

AFTER THE BATTLE



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CONTENTS

THE BATTLE FOR CHERBOURG 2

WRECK DISCOVERY
The Japanese Tanks of Bougainville 30

UNITED KINGDOM
The Women's Land Army 37

IT HAPPENED HERE
The Case of Pilot Officer
John Benzie 50

Front Cover: Captain William H. Hooper of the 314th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division, leading a group of German POWs out of Cherbourg along Avenue de Paris on June 28, 1944. Hooper would be killed two weeks later near La Haye-du-Puits. (USNA) *Inset:* The same view today. This is the old toll entrance to the city, known as L'Octroi, with Rue Armand Levéel branching off to the right in the background (see page 13). (Jean Paul Pallud)

Centre Pages: The remains of German coastal Battery 'Blankenese' in the dunes near Néville, 25 kilometres east of Cherbourg. Comprising four casemates for 94mm Flak guns and a fire-control bunker, it was manned in June 1944 by the 2. Batterie of Marine-Artillerie-Abteilung 260. (Jean Paul Pallud)

Back Cover: We believe that this headstone to an unknown pilot of the Second World War in Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey, marks the last resting place of Pilot Officer John Benzie. (ATB)

Acknowledgements: Our story on the battle for Cherbourg is taken from *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, 1951) by Gordon A. Harrison, a volume of the official history of the US Army in World War II, adapted and expanded with details from German sources. The Editor would like to thank the French Marine Nationale, particularly Vice Amiral Philippe Périssé, Préfet Maritime at Cherbourg, and the Direction des Constructions Navales (DCNS), particularly M. Bruno Richebé, Director Cherbourg, for allowing Jean Paul Pallud to visit their installations. He also thanks Marie Thérèse, Catherine, Jacques and Yannick Berton; Comte and Comtesse Arnaud de Pontac; Roger Delarocque and La Cité de la Mer. The Editor is further indebted to Roy J. Turner for his generous help with the feature on the Women's Land Army.

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Early on June 18, troops of US VII Corps, having advanced from Utah Beach since D-Day, reached Barneville and Carteret on the west coast of the Cotentin, cutting the peninsula in half. For the next ten days the Americans concentrated their operations on a northward drive aimed at taking Cherbourg and its port. The VII Corps attacked with three divisions abreast on June 19, encountering no opposition except on its right wing where the 4th Division came up against organised resistance in the Montebourg sector. Attacking with tank support on either side of the town, the 8th and 12th Infantry Regiments finally broke the German defence and by nightfall the 8th Infantry was south and east of Valognes with the 12th Infantry on its right.

When plans were drawn up for the Allied invasion of France, one important consideration was that it would be necessary to secure a deep-water port to allow reinforcements to be brought in directly from the United States. Cherbourg, at the tip of the Cotentin peninsula in Normandy, was closest to the landing beaches and the planners consequently decided that the US First Army's main task should be 'to capture Cherbourg as quickly as possible'.

The US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions spearheaded Operation 'Overlord' in the west, landing at the base of the peninsula. Their landings were scattered but they nevertheless secured most of the routes by which the American forces landing at Utah Beach would advance. The US 4th Infantry Division landed on Utah Beach shortly after dawn with few casualties (see *D-Day Then and Now*). For the first days, the priority was to link up with the main Allied landings further east. The flooded Douve valley was crossed on June 9 and Carantec captured the next day, giving the Allies a continuous front

at which point US VII Corps began to drive westwards to cut off the peninsula at its base.

On June 9, concerned over the threat of an enemy breakthrough to Cherbourg, the German 7. Armee ordered the 77. Infanterie-Division, then coming up from Brittany, to proceed up the peninsula to Valognes. Two days later, Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, the German Commander-in-Chief in the West, and Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel, the commander of Heeresgruppe B, met to discuss the serious situation and agreed to report independently to Hitler. Both reports gave the same appreciation of the German situation in Normandy and of the Allies' intentions. Von Rundstedt explained that 'the formations of Heeresgruppe B fighting in Normandy are forced on to the defensive between the Orne and the Vire. Offensive operations cannot as yet be conducted in this broad sector for lack of forces and because the panzer divisions had to be used for defence.' In order to prevent a breakthrough to Cherbourg, which was obviously the immediate American objective,



USNA

Above: In the second half of June 1944, the US First Army directed all its efforts towards the capture of Cherbourg as the great Channel port was considered vital for the supply of the American forces. Signal Corps photographer Sergeant Peter

J. Petrony pictured an M8 armored car of the 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion entering Montebourg during the northward advance toward the port city. **Below:** The southern entrance to Montebourg remains unchanged.

THE BATTLE FOR CHERBOURG

they proposed to counter-attack in the Cotentin. Pointing out that the purpose of this strike would be 'to annihilate the enemy there', Rommel stressed that 'only when this has been accomplished can the enemy between the Orne and the Vire be attacked'.

Refusing the field-m Marshals' demand that a counter-attack in the Cotentin was an urgent need, Hitler's reaction on June 12 was to insist that 'the enemy bridgehead between the Orne and Vire must be attacked and destroyed piece by piece'.

By Jean Paul Pallud

By June 14, it was clear that the Americans were close to cutting the peninsula in half so Rommel decided that two divisions (the 243.



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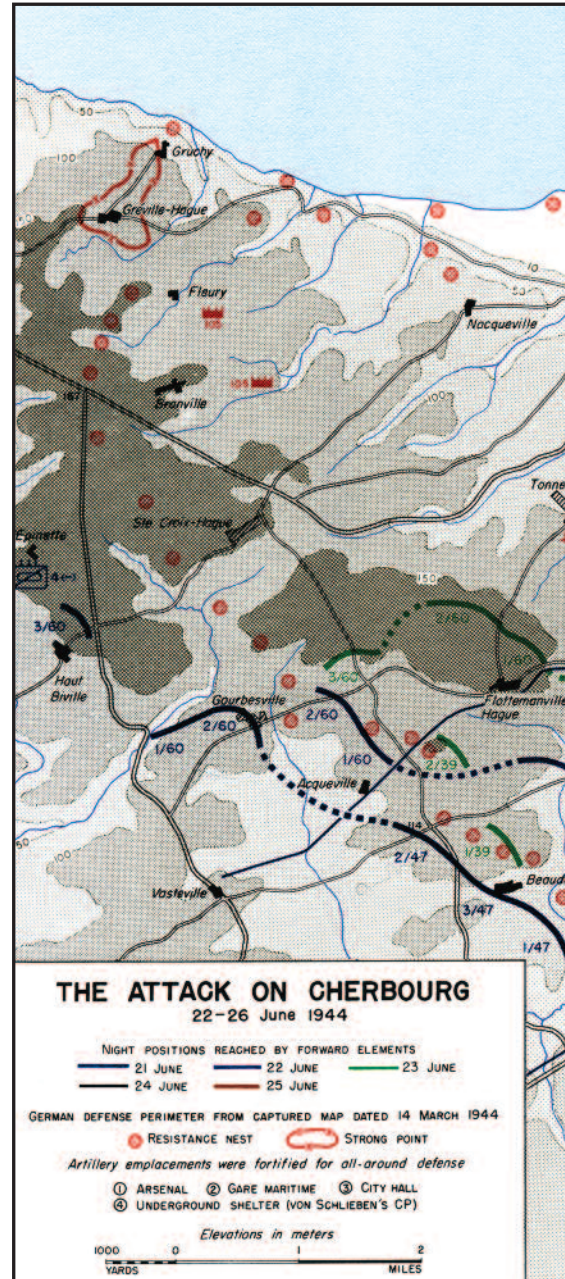
Above: The original plan for the drive on Cherbourg was for a two-division attack, by the 4th and 90th Divisions, while the 9th Division took up a blocking position on the west coast. However, on June 18, after consultation with Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, the First Army commander (left), and some of his division commanders, Major General J. Lawton Collins, the VII Corps commander (right), changed his plans in favour of a stronger attack. In order to take maximum advantage of the German disintegration, the idea was now to commit the corps' full combat strength. A fresh division, the 79th, would be deployed and three divisions — the 9th, 79th and 4th — would drive northwards abreast while the 90th Division would take over the task of blocking along the west coast. Here General Bradley listens to Collins (wearing goggles and an M1911 pistol in a shoulder holster) describing how the Cherbourg battle was fought — a picture taken later in June or early July.

and 709. Infanterie-Divisions) would be sufficient for the defence of Cherbourg and that the 77. Infanterie-Division should be moved south to oppose the American push to the south. Accordingly the 7. Armee issued orders to divide the forces in the Cotentin into two groups. Gruppe von Schlieben (under Generalleutnant Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben, the commander of the 709. Infanterie-Division), consisting of his own division and all the troops deployed on the Montebourg line (save the 77. Infanterie-Division), was charged with the defence of Cherbourg. Meanwhile, Gruppe Hellmich (under Generalleutnant Hans Hellmich, the commander of the 243. Infanterie-Division), with the 77. Infanterie-Division and all those troops south and west of the Merderet river, received the task of building a defensive line near the base of the Cotentin, between the marshlands west of Carentan and the peninsula's west coast near Portbail.

However, the following day an order from Hitler arrived which stipulated that the present line must be 'held at all cost'. Rommel, who was at the LXXXIV. Armeekorps headquarters near Saint-Lô when the Führer decree reached him, tried to make the best of an impossible situation. He decided that the 77. Infanterie-Division should send some elements southwards while ostensibly holding its ground. However, the 7. Armee soon forbade any move and orders given to the 77. Infanterie-Division were countermanded. As a consequence, nothing was accomplished during the night of June 16/17, squandering the last chance of rescuing the 77. Infanterie-Division from the closing trap.

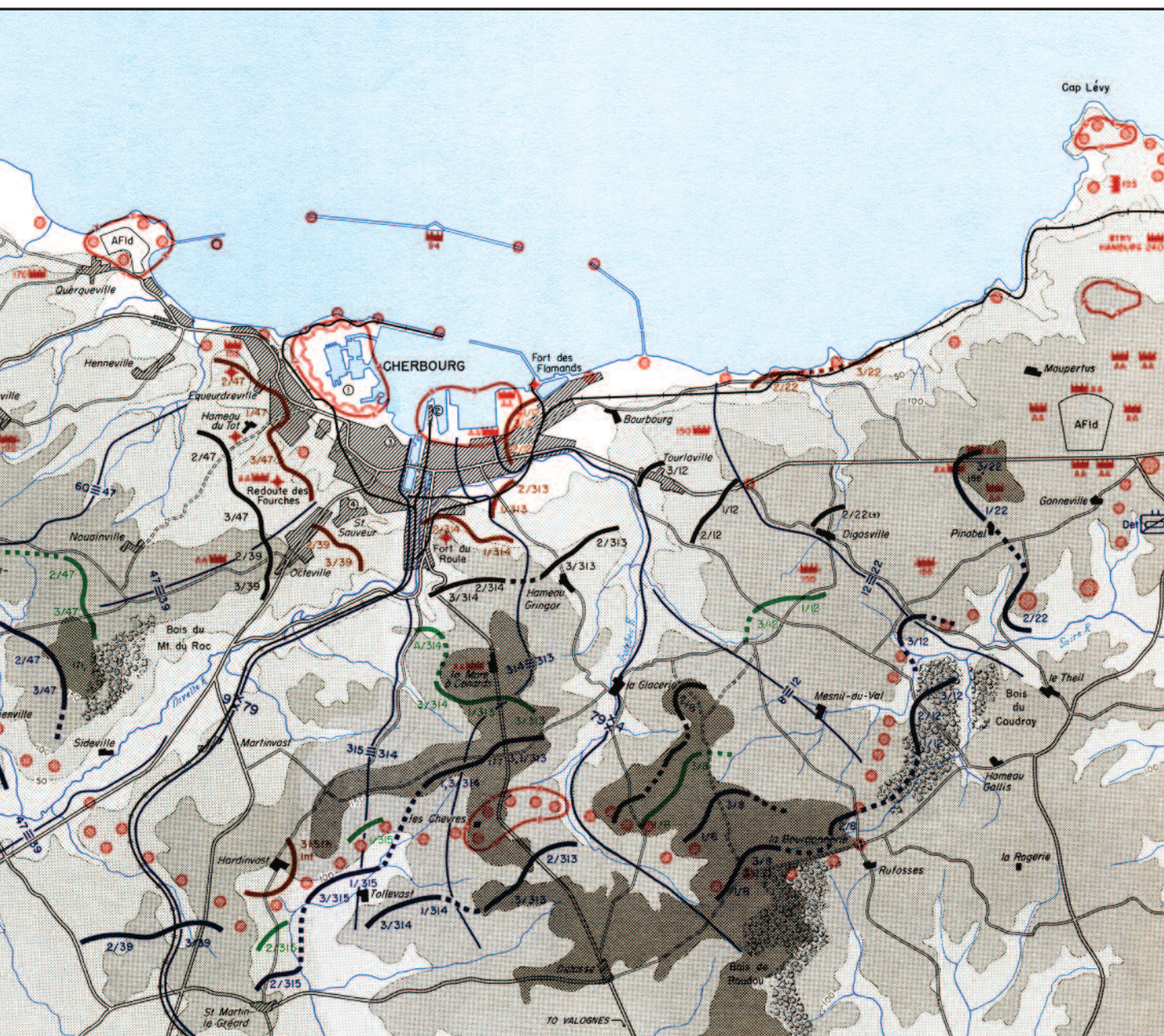
Following a demand from von Rundstedt on June 15 that someone from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW, German Armed Forces High Command) must come to France to discuss the situation, Hitler decided to come personally. A conference was arranged at the 'Wolfsschlucht 2' complex of camouflaged bunkers at Margival, north-east of Soissons (see *After the Battle* No. 19), on the morning of the 17th. Finding fault with the local commanders, Hitler expressed his dissatisfaction with their attempts to counter the Allied landings. Von Rundstedt and Rommel sought to obtain freedom of action, including permission to draw at will on reserves from coastal areas not immediately threatened by invasion. They also recommended certain withdrawals in order to shorten their lines and concentrate their forces but Hitler refused all of this. Instead, he ordered that fortress Cherbourg must be held at any cost as long as possible.

On June 17, the VII Corps continued its advance westwards, the main effort being made by the US 9th Division. Early on June 18, troops of its 60th Infantry entered Barneville, cutting the coast road and thus practically sealing off the base of the Cotentin. During the night and the following morning columns of Gruppe Hellmich tried to force their way southwards. On the 19th, elements of Grenadier-Regiment 1050 (of the 77. Infanterie-Division) succeeded in taking a bridge over the Ollande river, capturing more than 100 Americans, and permitting some 1,400 men to slip through to the south. This was one of the few German successes.



Many other columns were caught on the road and destroyed, among them the remainder of the divisional artillery. Delay in making vital decisions resulted in a disastrous confusion that sacrificed the bulk of the 77. Infanterie-Division for no gain. Among those who failed to escape were Generalleutnant Hellmich, killed on June 17, and Generalmajor Rudolf Stegmann, the commander of the 77. Infanterie-Division, fatally wounded near Bricquebec during a fighter-bomber attack the following afternoon.

Originally, VII Corps planned a two-division drive on Cherbourg with the 90th Division on the right and the 4th Division on the left. However, the 90th had demonstrated too many signs of unreadiness in the recent fighting, and on June 13 its commander, Brigadier General Jay W. MacKielvie was relieved and replaced by Major General Eugene M. Landrum. (Two regimental commanders, Colonel Philip H. Ginder of the 357th Infantry and Colonel James W. Thompson of the 358th Infantry, were relieved at the same time.) As a fresh division — the 79th Infantry Division — was available, the VII Corps commander, Major General J. Lawton Collins, asked for and received it as a replacement for the 90th.



On June 18, a new, stronger plan of attack was developed by General Collins in consultation with Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, the commander of the US First Army, and some of the division commanders. The drive on Cherbourg would now be carried out by three divisions abreast: the 4th on the right, the 79th in the centre and the 9th on the left. The 4th Division was to bypass the coastal defences in order to advance as rapidly as possible with its right flank protected by the 24th Cavalry Squadron. The 4th Cavalry Squadron was to be used to attack between the 9th and 79th Divisions while the 90th Division was to take over the role initially envisioned for the 9th Division of blocking the west coast.

Through capture by the 9th Division of field orders of the LXXXIV. Armeekorps and the 77. Infanterie-Division, VII Corps had a pretty accurate picture of the state of German defences in the peninsula. General Collins knew of the splitting of German forces and of the order to General von Schlieben to withdraw from the fortress Cherbourg. The last-minute attempt of the 77. Infanterie-Division to pull south of the 9th Division lines had been cut off, and it could be assumed that disorganisation existed in

the western half of the German lines. By attacking fast and hard VII Corps might exploit the disorganisation as well as push General von Schlieben's planned withdrawal into a rout. VII Corps Intelligence estimated that the enemy would fight delaying actions and would stand for a defence of Cherbourg on the line of hills ringing it to a depth of about five miles. Fixed defences in this position had been reconnoitred and plotted accurately long before D-Day. Although the exact number of German troops at von Schlieben's disposal for the defence of Cherbourg could only be guessed at, it was known that all his major combat units (the 709., 243., 91. and 77. Infanterie-Divisions) existed only in fragments. The total enemy force locked in the peninsula was variously estimated at between 25,000 and 40,000 including Flak and naval personnel and Organisation Todt workers.

The VII Corps attacked early on June 19. On the left, the 9th Division (Major General Manton S. Eddy) encountered no opposition and easily reached its designated objectives. In the centre, the 79th Division (Major General Ira T. Wyche) did the same on its left wing although it experienced some difficulties on its right south-west of Valognes. Only

the 4th Division (Major General Raymond O. Barton) on the right wing came up against organised resistance when the 8th and 12th Infantry Regiments attacked side by side on a north-west axis on either side of Montebourg. However, tank support got the attack moving and both regiments soon broke the German line. By nightfall the 8th Infantry was just south and east of Valognes with the 12th Infantry on its right. The 22nd Infantry entered Montebourg at 6 p.m. and found the town deserted.

The resistance in front of the 4th Division on June 19 was actually little more than a gesture by General von Schlieben at carrying out his orders to fight his way slowly back to fortress Cherbourg. The orders could scarcely have been carried out. On his west flank, von Schlieben had no positions to hold and only disorganised troops who would have been needlessly sacrificed if they had attempted a stand. The plunge forward of the 9th and 79th Divisions during June 19 rendered defence of the sector opposite the 4th Division useless and dangerous. During the night, therefore, von Schlieben ordered a general disengagement on this front and drew all his force back to the fortress ring immediately defending Cherbourg.



USNA

Left: As early as June 12, after reports that Montebourg was lightly held, Major General Raymond O. Barton, commanding the 4th Division, ordered the 8th Infantry Regiment to take the town if it could be captured without suffering too many losses. However, a task force soon discovered that the place was strongly defended and the attack was called off. This Jeep and



ATB

these trailers were possibly disabled during the fighting that day. The tower of Saint-Jacques Church, seen in the background and damaged later in the battle, was still intact when this photo was taken. *Right:* A new roundabout at the western entrance of Montebourg today interrupts the straight stretch of main road leading into town.

JUNE 20

When the 4th Division resumed the attack on June 20, it found open country ahead. At first the troops advanced cautiously. They paused to investigate Valognes. The city was choked with rubble but no enemy were in sight. By noon it was clear that the enemy had broken all contact and the regiments took route march formations on the roads and walked north. In this way all arrived by

nightfall on their objectives in a line from Le Theil to the Bois de Roudou. This line was just in front of the main enemy defences of Cherbourg and, as the leading companies approached, they brushed with enemy outposts and in some cases came under severe hostile artillery fire.

The experience of the 79th Division on June 20 was similar. Both the 313th and 314th Infantry Regiments advanced to the

road running roughly east-west between the Bois de Roudou and Saint-Martin-le-Gréard. On that line both met resistance which clearly indicated that they had hit outposts of the Cherbourg defences. Eloquent of the haste with which the Germans had withdrawn was the capture intact at one point of four light tanks and an 88mm gun and at another of eight tanks. The 315th Infantry during the day cleared stragglers from the



USNA

Left: For about a week, the 4th Division held the line in front of Montebourg. Then on June 18, with the rapid push of the 9th Division up the west side of the peninsula threatening to out-flank his forces, the German commander, Generalleutnant Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben, was forced to order all his troops back to the fortress ring defending Cherbourg. Montebourg was



ATB

abandoned that night and the 22nd Infantry entered the deserted town without difficulty the next day. As the place had been bombed and shelled since June 6, the Americans found the streets filled with rubble and lined with ruined buildings. This is Rue Paul Lecacheux, the main thoroughfare, looking north. *Right:* The same view today.



USNA

Left: Another shot by Sergeant Petrony of the column of the 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion that we saw earlier (page 3) with the M8 armored car being followed by a half-track towing a 76mm anti-tank gun. The convoy was on the move following General Barton's decision of June 20 to send the 2nd



ATB

Battalion of the 12th Infantry and a company of tank destroyers to relieve the 8th Infantry which were containing Valognes, the next town on the road north to Cherbourg. *Right:* This is another picture taken in Rue Paul Lecacheux at the point where it enters the town from the south.



USNA

Left: Valognes was repeatedly bombed from June 6 onwards, the worst raid being on the 8th when the centre of the town was destroyed, burying over 100 civilians under the rubble. More bombing and shelling followed and when the Americans finally entered the town on June 20, they found the streets so choked with debris that they were impassable for several days. This picture was taken on June 24 when engineers were



ATB

clearing a passage through the ruins. The Jeep named *Always Ruth* belonged to the 298th Engineer Combat Battalion. Right: The same spot today on the Rue de la Poterie, looking south towards the Place Vicq d'Azir. This part of Valognes was so utterly devastated that it had to be completely rebuilt after the war. However, the surviving parts of the Eglise Saint-Malo were incorporated into the new church.

Valognes area and then moved into reserve positions behind the lead regiments.

The 9th Division, which on June 19 had already come up against the outer veil of the main enemy defences, had quite a different experience on June 20. On wings of optimism in the course of the rapid unopposed advance of June 19, VII Corps had given General Eddy objectives deep inside fortress Cherbourg: Flottemanville, Octeville and positions athwart the Cherbourg—Cap de la Hague road.

The advance of the 60th Infantry, paralleling the main enemy defences, was rapid until about noon when it reached high ground a few hundred yards from its initial objective, Hill 170. It was slowed then by increasing enemy artillery fire. Delay here, however, was not serious, for sufficient advance had been made to permit the 47th Infantry following to come up west of its objectives and make the turn east. The 1st and 2nd Battalions attacked abreast north and south of the Bois de Nerest. Both were stopped not far from their line of departure as the enemy suddenly uncovered a stiff and carefully prepared defence. The experience of the 2nd Battalion was typical of what happened all along the front as VII Corps pressed in on the enemy's last bastion. Fired on by German outposts in houses at a crossroads south-east of Acqueville, the battalion was first checked. Then from the main enemy positions on hills to the east came withering direct and indirect fire from 88mm, 20mm and machine guns. The command group of the battalion was hit by a shellburst, the commander, Lieutenant Colonel James D. Johnston, mortally wounded, and a number of his officers injured. Unable to push forward, the battalion had to withdraw out of the area of concentrated fire.

Since, with the 47th Infantry stopped, the 39th would be unable to advance past it toward objectives to the north, General Eddy promptly altered the division plan. Objectives at Flottemanville were assigned to the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 60th Infantry while the 3rd Battalion was directed to carry out a portion of the regiment's original blocking mission by taking positions on the crossroads formed by the junction of the Les Pieux and Cherbourg roads into Cap de la Hague. Again the advance north proved relatively easy and the 3rd Battalion came within 1,000 yards of its objectives. But the two battalions that attempted to turn east were stopped virtually in their tracks in front of Gourbesville. The 9th Division ground to a halt. Road marches were over; hard fighting lay ahead.



USNA

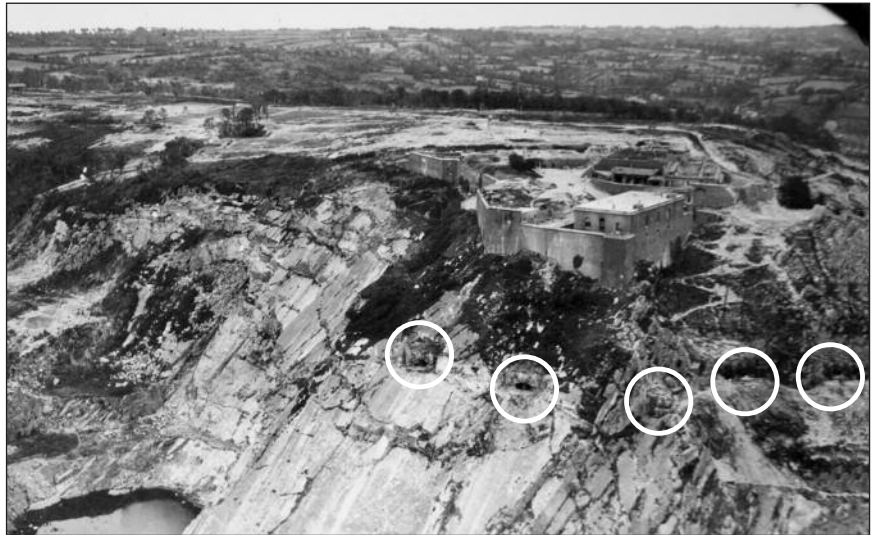
Private Malvin A. Gillespie, of Plymouth, Massachusetts, leading a group of German prisoners through a less-damaged section of Valognes on June 21.



ATB

The picture was taken in Rue des Religieuses and the prisoners were being marched south-eastwards in the direction of Montebourg.

Built high and secure into the steep rock promontory which lies on the inland side of Cherbourg, the Fort du Roule was a formidable bastion which appeared particularly daunting from the sea. The Germans had installed four casemates, each one mounting a 105mm gun, and a fire-control bunker into the rock under the edge of the cliff while an elaborate complex of galleries and magazines had been excavated to service them. The whole site was manned by the 5. Batterie of Marine-Artillerie-Abteilung 260. The fort enjoyed a remarkably favourable defensive position, the steep sides of the outcrop restricting the approach along a solitary ridge. From the landward side only the top level of the fort was visible and defence against ground attack was mounted from this level with automatic weapons and mortars in concrete pill-boxes. The Germans had also dug an anti-tank ditch a few hundred metres south-east of the fort.



GALLERIE 117



GALLERIE 117

For over six decades the German galleries in the Fort du Roule remained out of bounds but then a decision was taken to open it to the public. After a year of cleaning and renovating the

bunkers (left) and tunnels (right), the former German strong point was opened to visitors on June 26, 2009 — the 65th anniversary of Cherbourg's liberation (see www.gallerie117.fr).

FESTUNG CHERBOURG

The German defences facing the VII Corps consisted of a belt of field fortifications disposed in a rough semi-circle along favourable terrain from six to ten kilometres out from the harbour. However, the German command had fallen into the same trap as had the British at Singapore (see *After the Battle* No. 31), namely forgetting that Cherbourg might be attacked from the rear, so that defences facing inland were only very partially built by June 1944. Only two positions on the coast — Osteck (Eastern Corner) near Carneville and Westeck (Western Corner) near Gréville-Hague — were well developed, as was a position named Les Chèvres controlling the N13 Valognes to Cherbourg main road. The defence line consisted mainly of trenches and foxholes, but in the best-developed sectors there were some concrete structures with machine-gun turrets and mortars. Most of these fixed defences were known to the Allies and already overprinted on the maps issued to all the American commanders. From east to west, the line ran approximately as follows: Cap Lévy — Maupertus — Le Theil — Hardinvast — Sideville — Hills 128 and 131 — Flotte-manville — Sainte-Croix-Hague — Branville — Gruchy. Inside, closer to the harbour, a weak second line of defence had been built along a belt of old French fortifications.

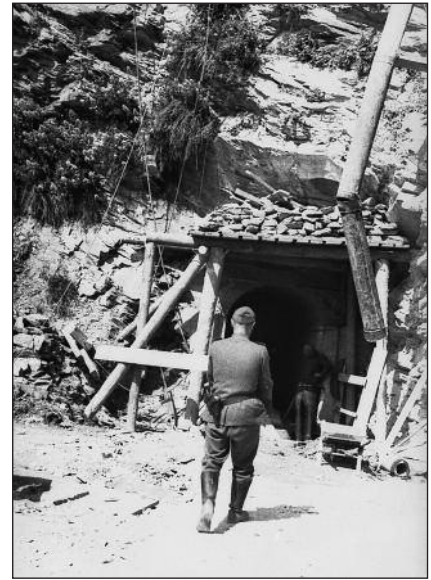


ULLSTEIN

On June 23, Generalleutnant von Schlieben (centre) was appointed commander of Festung Cherbourg, relieving Generalmajor Robert Sattler (right), who became his subordinate. Here they are pictured in their command post with Konteradmiral Walther Hennecke, Naval Commander Normandy (left).



As American troops rapidly invested the fortress, von Schlieben moved his command post into an underground shelter which had been prepared in a quarry in the suburb of Saint-Sauveur which lies in the south-western outskirts of Cherbourg. Located some 20 metres below ground level, the complex comprised four parallel tunnels, each 4.5 metres wide and about 85 metres long, with three entrances: two side by



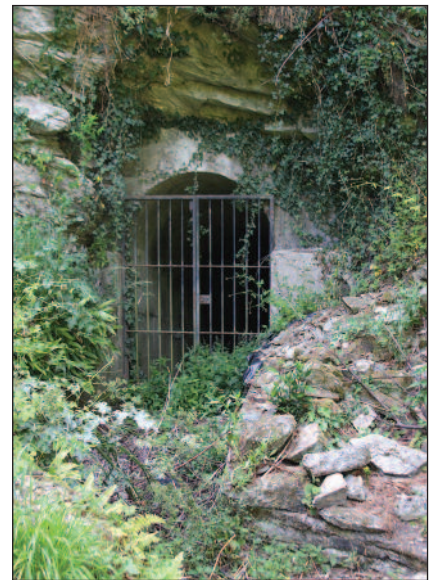
side in the quarry at the north-eastern end and one at the south-western end. The Kriegsmarine had begun to build an ammunition depot in these tunnels although this work was far from completed in June 1944. *Left:* A German photographer pictured the two entrances in the quarry sometime in mid-June. *Right:* He then took a close-up of the right-hand, main entrance (compare with the photos on page 17).



The old quarry is now a magnificent garden. The main entrance disappeared decades ago when a part of the rock face collapsed but the second entrance can still be seen (*above right*),

With a total of 20,000 men, at first sight Festung Cherbourg might seem to have been strongly defended. However this total included a motley collection of security and fortress troops, untrained Flak gunners and naval personnel, and Todt workers. In addition, most of the regular soldiers were over-age and a sizeable part of the force, about one-fifth, were Osttruppen — volunteers from the East, generally Russian ex-prisoners of war. The combat efficiency of these troops was extremely low and General von Schlieben had already reported his worries about this to the 7. Armee. Ammunition was generally sufficient for immediate needs and, except for a shortage of machine-gun cartridges, stocks were maintained at adequate levels during the siege by U-Boat and S-Boat deliveries and air drops. (Between June 20 and 30, 107 transport planes dropped 188 tons of supplies to the Cherbourg garrison.)

On June 20, after the retreat from the Montebourg line, von Schlieben reorganised the defences in order to put, as far as possible, regimental commanders with their units in sectors familiar to them. Four regimental Kampfgruppen were formed. On the west was a group under Oberstleutnant Franz Müller, commander of Infanterie-Regiment 922, mainly comprising the remnants of the 243. Infanterie-Division and holding the line from Vauville on the peninsula's west coast to Sainte-Croix-Hague. From there to the Briquebec — Cherbourg road the line was held by a Kampfgruppe consisting of Infanterie-Regiment 919 and MG-Bataillon 17 (a heavy machine gun battalion) under Oberstleutnant Günther Keil. From there eastward to a point south of Le Mesnil-au-Val was Oberst Walter Köhn with Infanterie-Regiment 739, and on the east was Oberst Helmuth Rohrbach with his Infanterie-Regiment 729.



now sealed off by an iron gate. Today the area is privately owned and, although the present owners kindly gave Jean Paul access for this feature, no visits are possible.

JUNE 22

To the Allies, the capture of Cherbourg was given dramatic urgency by a four-day storm which struck without warning on June 19. When winds began to moderate on June 22, the artificial port at Omaha Beach was a total loss, the beach being littered with wreckage leaving few free areas where new landings could take place. Utah Beach suffered less both in craft losses and beach wreckage since landings could be extended northward and unloading was resumed at full scale on the 23rd. Before the storm had ended, General Collins had issued orders for the resumption of the attack on Cherbourg, stressing that the attack was now to be 'the major effort of the American army'.

The 9th and 79th Divisions devoted the 21st to patrolling and reorganisation while the 4th Division, still a little short of the enemy's ring of prepared defences, continued its advance to the main line of German



USNA

Left: One of the last German strong points to fall was the old French naval Arsenal, captured by the 47th Infantry on June 27. Its Bastion 2 housed four German casemates with 105mm guns manned by the 4. Batterie of Marine-Artillerie-Abteilung 260. After the battle, a Signal Corps photographer pictured the



ATB

battery's fire-control bunker at the western end of the line of casemates. Right: The Marine Nationale (French Navy) gave Jean Paul permission to enter Bastion 2 where the old German battery still stands, though abandoned for years. A post-war French addition to the bunker's roof has altered its shape.

resistance. By evening, all three divisions of VII Corps were drawn up tight against the Cherbourg fortress, ready for the final assault.

Collins requested air pulverisation of some 20 square miles before the jump-off, more to demoralise the Germans and force surrender than as direct preparation for the ground advance. The air strike would employ the entire US IX Bomber Command (medium bombers) as well as large numbers of US and British fighter-bombers. The plan was developed under great difficulties not only because time was short but also because all the units of the US Ninth Air Force participating in the attack were based in England.

All air preparation was to be concentrated in the zones of the 79th and 9th Divisions south and south-west of Cherbourg. Starting 80 minutes before H-Hour, four squadrons of Typhoon fighter-bombers of the British Second Tactical Air Force were to attack with rockets throughout the northern portion of the attack zone concentrating on enemy anti-aircraft positions. Following them, six squadrons of Mustangs also belonging to the British tactical air forces would strafe throughout the area. From H minus 60 minutes, 12 groups of Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers would bomb and strafe enemy strong points in front of the American lines, attacking in waves at five-minute intervals. As ground troops moved out, all 11 groups of the US IX Bomber Command were to bomb 11 defended localities in a pattern bombing designed to constitute a kind of rolling barrage in front of the ground attack. Despite the large number of aircraft involved, the bombs to be dropped amounted to only about 1,100 tons over a wide area. The attack was not intended as a carpet bombing of the type later used at Caen and in the Saint-Lô break-out. The idea was to achieve the maximum demoralisation of an enemy who, because he was already in a state of hopeless siege, might be expected to have an already weakened morale.

The hopelessness of the German position was pointed out to the Cherbourg garrison in a multilingual broadcast (German, Russian, Polish and French) on the night of June 21/22 when General Collins demanded the immediate surrender of Cherbourg. General von Schlieben was given until 0900 hours the following morning to capitulate. But the ultimatum expired without answer from von Schlieben. Preparations were therefore completed for the assault.

Attack into Cherbourg itself was to be made by the 9th and 79th Divisions while the 4th Division sealed off the city from the east. The 9th Division, making its main effort on its right, would seize Octeville while the 79th



USNA

One of the battery's four Type M176 casemates.



ATB

The peculiar raised step visible in the foreground of the wartime picture made it possible to identify the casemate as the first one from the west with the fire-control bunker standing just off to the right. However, Jean Paul preferred to show the better-looking third casemate for his comparison.

Division captured the nose of high ground which terminated in the Fort du Roule overlooking Cherbourg from the south. This would bring both divisions up on the high ground immediately ringing the port. The 4th Division on the right was to capture Tourlaville and send patrols from there to the sea. H-Hour was set for 1400 hours.

Bombing began according to plan at 1240, June 22. From the testimony of prisoners, it appears that the air attacks were successful in their main purpose of weakening German will to resist, though the results were not apparent during the first day's action. For 20 minutes hundreds of fighters dived, strafed and skip-bombed from altitudes as low as 300 feet. Twenty-four were lost to enemy Flak. The end of the nerve-wrecking attack signalled only the beginning of an hour of relentless bombing – wave after wave (375 planes in all) flying out of the west and loosing their bombs methodically on or near the six principal targets: Flottemanville, Martinvast, Les Chèvres, La Mare-à-Canards, Fort du Roule and a defended locality just west of Octeville. (In the 9th Division zone, the white phosphorous and yellow smoke markers laid by the division artillery were unfortunately moved back by the wind and the 47th and 60th Infantry were bombed and strafed by their own aircraft, causing many casualties.) At the same time, artillery shelled enemy anti-aircraft batteries, with particular effectiveness in the 9th Division zone, and then, after troops began to move, fired on enemy defences.

All three divisions made slow advances during the afternoon. The 9th Division attacked with the 60th Infantry on the left and the 47th Infantry (backed by the 39th Infantry) on the right. The axis of advance remained the same: the 60th pointed toward Flottemanville, the 47th toward the Bois du Mont du Roc. The 39th Infantry was assem-



BA 101II-M4K6K-1157-19

Destruction of the harbour installations was carried out methodically by Kriegsmarine personnel and the war diary of Marinegruppenkommando West kept a daily account of the progress of demolitions. They began as early as June 7 and were continued right up to the final surrender. Some of the worst destruction in the entire port was that on the Quai de France (above), on the western side of the Darse Transatlantique. Once a modern wharf capable of berthing the largest ocean liners, more than 15,000 cubic metres of caisson masonry were blown out from along 600 metres of its quay wall. Also the Gare Maritime, where passengers could alight from liners and board trains for Paris, was badly damaged. Below right: The ruined quay was nicely rebuilt and the movable ship-to-train access galleries that survived German destruction are still in use today by the large cruise ships that call at Cherbourg. However, the railway station in the Gare Maritime has gone and the building now houses La Cité de la Mer, a cultural complex dedicated to the deep sea and its conquest. Among the many exhibits is *Le Redoutable*, ex-SSBN of the French Navy, which is currently the biggest submarine open to the public in the world.



BA 101II-M4K6K-1159-07

Left: In company with an unidentified Korvettenkapitän (right), Fregattenkapitän Hermann Witt (left), harbour commander, and Konteradmiral Hennecke (centre) discuss their plans to destroy the Gare Maritime. The 70-metre-high Campanile was



ATB



BA 101II-M4K6K-1159-20

still standing when a PK photographer took this photo sometime in June 1944 but it was soon to be blown up (right). On June 26, Hennecke was awarded the Knight's Cross for this work of destruction in the harbour of Cherbourg.



Left: The 39th and 47th Infantry Regiments of the 9th Division fought their way through the western half of the city on June 25. History was made by the 2nd Battalion of the 47th Infantry when its leaders entered Cherbourg at 12.55 p.m. Both Company E and the attached engineers from the 15th Engineer Combat Battalion could lay claim to having been the first to set



foot inside the city but the accepted version is that Pfc John T. Sarao of Company E won. War photographer Robert Capa of *Life* entered Cherbourg with the 47th Infantry's 1st Battalion and he took this picture in the same quarter of Cherbourg the following day. **Right:** Rue Pierre de Coubertin, with Yannick Berton standing in for the surrendering Germans.

bled near Helleville. The 60th Infantry, attacking with battalions echeloned to the left to guard its open flank, at first moved rapidly and captured Acqueville within half an hour of the jump-off. The 47th similarly moved past Crossroads 114 where it had been held up on June 21 and pushed one battalion beyond Beaudienville. But the latter advance was made by bypassing the enemy at the crossroads and it had to be halted in the early evening to permit mopping up. At the end of June 22, forward battalions were dug in on the slopes of Hill 171 just west of the Bois du Mont du Roc. The 60th Infantry pressed the attack to the edge of enemy fortifications at Flottemanville but could not penetrate the position before dark.

The 79th Division, attacking with three regiments abreast, came up against similarly stubborn enemy resistance. The 313th Infantry, making the division's main effort along the Valognes — Cherbourg highway, was first stopped by the Les Chèvres strong point which straddled the road. The German line was broken by the 3rd Battalion on the left and rolled up, while the 1st Battalion attacked frontally. After reorganisation, the regiment pushed on against lighter resistance to reach a point just south of its next major obstacle — the fortified anti-aircraft position at La Mare-à-Canards. The 315th Infantry meanwhile spent the day fighting to clear the Hardinvast area. The 314th Infantry fought in the draws east of Tollevast until after dark, when one battalion slipped around the

enemy positions and made contact with the 313th Infantry west of Crossroads 177. At this point the 314th was only a few hundred yards from a German communications bunker which contained the switchboard for the entire Cherbourg sector. The bunker was not discovered and remained to function for a day or so behind the American lines, reporting to von Schlieben some details of American movements.

The three regiments of the 4th Division experienced hard, confused fighting on June 22 which netted only small gains. The main effort was made by the 12th Infantry attacking north-west from the northern tip of the Bois du Coudray with the mission of seizing Tourlaville. But in confused fighting, during which the enemy continually filtered to the rear of the forward battalions, the regiment was able to advance only a few hundred yards. On its right the 22nd Infantry, which was to have attacked from positions near Gonnevillle to take Digosville and so support the effort of the 12th Infantry, found itself surrounded by the enemy and spent the whole day trying to clear its own rear areas to keep its supply routes open. The 8th Infantry on the division left flank had the mission of capturing high ground east of La Glacière in the triangle between the Trottebec river and its principal tributary, where it would be pinched out by the north-west advance of the 12th Infantry on Tourlaville. Attacking from the north edge of the Bois de Roudou, the regiment made little progress.

One of its battalions, attempting to envelop the enemy line, was caught by delayed enemy fire from prepared hedgerow positions and by tree-burst artillery fire; it lost 31 killed and 92 wounded.

On June 22 General von Schlieben received from Hitler full authority for the defence of the port: 'Even if worst comes to worst, it is your duty to defend the last bunker and leave to the enemy not a harbour but a field of ruins. . . The German people and the whole world are watching your fight; on it depends the conduct and result of operations to smash the beach-heads, and the honour of the German Army and of your own name.'

Von Schlieben knew well that the final stand would not last long. He told Rommel that his own troops were exhausted in body and spirit; that the port garrison was over-age, untrained and suffering from 'bunker paralysis' (verbunkert), and that the leaderless remnants of the 243. and 77. Infanterie-Divisions were more of a burden than a support. 'Reinforcement', he concluded, 'is absolutely necessary'.

Reinforcement was briefly contemplated the next day. Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 15 in Brittany being alerted for movement by sea to Cherbourg. However, a few hours later, reports of the complete destruction and closing of the Cherbourg harbour (by German engineer troops) caused the move to be cancelled. Dropping of parachute troops was considered but no aircraft were available.



Left: Another picture taken in the 9th Division sector, this time showing the 39th Infantry. **Right:** The same view today, looking down Rue Président Loubet with Notre Dame du Voeux Church



in middle distance on the left. Jean Paul took his comparison from Boulevard Pierre Mendes-France, which today cuts Rue Président Loubet in two.

JUNE 23

Fighting on June 23 was still heavy, but all three American divisions made significant penetrations into the main German defences. In the 9th Division zone, the 39th Infantry cleared fortified positions north-west of Beaudienville, which had been bypassed. The 47th Infantry completed the reduction of enemy defences on Hill 171, capturing 400 prisoners during the day's fighting. The two regiments thus established themselves firmly astride the ridge leading to Cherbourg inside the outer ring of enemy defences. The 60th Infantry, after a long-delayed air bombardment and artillery concentrations on the Flottemanville area, moved in to occupy its objective with comparative ease in the evening.

The 79th Division was troubled at first by enemy infiltrations behind the forward regiments. While these were cleared up, the 314th Infantry attacked the enemy positions at La Mare-à-Canards. The attack failed to achieve its objective, but one company worked around to the north-west and was able to hold there while the remainder of the regiment was withdrawn a little to await air bombardment.

The 4th Division, though unable to reach its principal objective, Tourlaville, made good progress on June 23 as the attack of the 12th Infantry with tank support began to gather momentum. Two tanks attached to each of the forward companies of the lead battalion moved generally along the roads, firing in support of the infantry and, on occasion, turning into the fields to steamroller enemy riflemen. In the evening, behind a rolling artillery barrage laid close to their front, the troops marched up a hill that commanded the approaches to Cherbourg and dug in for the night, ready for the final assault on Tourlaville. The 22nd Infantry again on June 23 was occupied mainly with clearing enemy from its own sector. One battalion, eventually released for attack north-west, was stopped at once by heavy German fire. The 8th Infantry, while scoring only minor advances during the day, had one notable success when the 3rd Battalion launched an attack at the very moment when the enemy was forming for counter-attack. Finding the Germans lying head to heel along some hedgerows, the battalion opened rifle and tank fire and routed them with heavy losses.

With the penetrations into the outer ring of the Cherbourg fortress, the battle for the port entered its final phase. General von Schlieben reported on the morning of the 24th that he had no reserves left. The fall of Cherbourg, he said, is inevitable. 'The only question is whether it is possible to postpone it for a few days'.



USNA

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Divette river, the 79th Division drove into the city from the south-east with the 314th Infantry on the left and the 313th on the right. A Signal Corps photographer with the 314th pictured this dead German, still clutching a hand-grenade, in Rue Armand Levéel. Note the air raid shelter sign.



ATB

The Café Etasse has since closed but the building remains unchanged. This is the beginning of Rue Armand Levéel, just as it branches off from Avenue de Paris.



USNA

Left: French civilians pass another dead German lying in Rue du Val de Saire in the sector of the 313th Infantry. Right: Although the house on the right can no longer be seen from this position, hidden as it is by a new large police headquarters



ATB

building, Jean Paul found that it does still stand, as does the blockhouse visible in the left background. He took his comparison from Avenue Reibell, standing beside the blockhouse, looking diagonally across the view in the 1944 photo.



USNA

Left: Men of the 313th Infantry pose for the camera of Signal Corps photographer Tech/5 Louis Weintraub 'after all snipers had been cleaned out'. **Right:** The shot turned out to have been



ATB

taken in the same street, Rue du Val de Saire. The house number visible above the door, No. 143, made it an easy comparison to pinpoint.

JUNE 24

On June 24 VII Corps closed in on the city. The 9th Division overran three defended Luftwaffe installations as the 47th and 39th Infantry Regiments attacked along the ridge north-east into Octeville while the 60th Infantry held and cleared the north flank. Enemy fire was often heavy but, when the American infantry closed in, the defence crumbled. The 39th Infantry in the evening halted and established positions in front of Octeville under corps orders not to become involved in the city that day. The 47th Infantry, after assisting the 39th in the capture of an anti-aircraft emplacement, turned north toward the old French fort of Equeurdreville, the German coastal battery north of it, and the Redoute des Fourches. With the coming of darkness, however, attack on these positions was postponed.

In the 79th Division zone the 314th Infantry, supported by dive-bombing P-47s of the Ninth Air Force, cleared La Mare-à-Canards and pushed on to within sight of the Fort du Roule. Three attempts to break through to the fort were frustrated by fire from the direction of Octeville on the division's dangling left flank. The 315th Infantry on the left was far behind, still engaged at Hardinvast. The 313th Infantry, on the other flank, kept pace, veering slightly eastward to reduce resistance west of La Glacerie and at Gringor. At the latter position 320 prisoners and several artillery pieces were taken.

The whole Cherbourg defence was collapsing and nowhere more completely than on the east. But the collapse was preceded by some bitter last stands that exacted heavy

toll of some of the attacking units. The 8th Infantry making its last attack before being pinched out between the 12th Infantry and 79th Division, hit determined resistance east of La Glacerie. The Germans here, defending with light artillery, anti-aircraft guns, mortars, and machine guns, threw back the first American attack. The second attempt made with tank support got around to the east of the enemy position and the Germans pulled out. The cost of the day's fighting to the 8th Infantry was 37 killed, including Lieutenant Colonel Conrad Simmons, the 1st Battalion commander.

The 12th Infantry, again making the main divisional effort, now with one battalion of the 22nd Infantry attached, by evening had occupied the last high ground before Tourlaville, from which the city of Cherbourg was visible. In the attack Lieutenant Colonel John W. Merrill, who had taken command of the 1st Battalion the day before, was killed. One of the hardest fights in the area was fought at Digosville where the enemy stood to defend an artillery position. The position was overrun by one company with tank support, after a dive-bombing attack by 12 P-47s. Tourlaville was occupied that night without a fight. In the day's advance the 12th Infantry took 800 prisoners.

That evening General von Schlieben reported: 'Concentrated enemy fire and bombing attacks have split the front. Numerous batteries have been put out of action or have worn out. Combat efficiency has fallen off considerably. The troops squeezed into a small area will hardly be able to withstand an attack on the 25th.'

JUNE 25

To coincide with the final ground assault, General Bradley arranged a strong naval bombardment of the batteries and shore defences guarding the approaches to the city. Commanded by American Rear-Admiral Morton L. Deyo, Task Force 129 comprised three battleships (USS *Arkansas*, *Nevada* and *Texas*), four cruisers (USS *Quincy* and *Tuscaloosa* and HMS *Enterprise* and *Glasgow*), three American and six British destroyers to provide additional firepower and anti-submarine protection, and the British 9th and 159th Minesweeping Flotillas and US 7th Minesweeping Squadron to clear lanes. The long-range bombardment initially planned was cancelled shortly before the start of the operation when First Army expressed worries that the leading ground forces might already have entered the firing zones. Therefore the ships were brought closer in, to a position about 14,000 yards north of Cherbourg, before opening fire.

As the force was approaching the new position just after midday, German shore batteries — particularly Batterie 'Hamburg' near Fermanville, Batterie 'Brommy' near Le Béquet and Batterie 'York' near Amfreville (see *After the Battle* No. 146) — opened fire with accuracy. Destroyers made smoke, the bombarding ships increased speed, and within minutes all had opened up on their designated targets, fire soon being shifted to the batteries that were shelling the ships. The *Texas* received a direct hit on her conning tower which wrecked the navigational bridge and facilities. *Glasgow* and destroyers *O'Brien*, *Laffey* and *Barton* also sustained



USNA

Left: Sherman tanks, most probably belonging to the 749th Tank Battalion, the armoured unit permanently attached to the 79th Division, entering Cherbourg. They are on Rue du Val de Saire at its junction with Rue Jean Fleury. The centre of



ATB

Cherbourg lies off to the right. Over on the left is Saint-Clément Church and, across the road to the right, stands a large hospital, named the Hôpital Dieu in 1944. **Right:** Today the transformation from war to peace is complete.



USMA

Pushing forward in the early morning of June 26, the leading troops of the 313th Infantry reached the beach in their sector by 8 a.m. but the 314th was delayed by enemy fire from the left. This was because the 39th Infantry Regiment of the neighbouring 9th Division lagged behind and the 314th only reached the sea by mid-afternoon. Signal Corps photographer Franklin pictured a GI of the 314th making a dash forward while another soldier covers his advance.

hits and damage to various degrees. The *Nevada* had several near misses that covered her decks with water and splinters but she was not hit. The naval force withdrew at 1530 hours, having fired about 3,000 shells, own casualties being given as 13 killed and 86 wounded.

Early that afternoon von Schlieben reported: 'In addition to superiority in materiel and artillery, air force and tanks, heavy fire from the sea has started, directed by spotter planes'. . . 'I must state in the line of duty', he concluded, 'that further sacrifices cannot alter anything'. To this Rommel replied by radio: 'You will continue to fight until the last cartridge in accordance with the order from the Führer.'

Meanwhile VII Corps was closing in. On the right, the 12th Infantry scarcely paused on reaching its objective of June 24. Continuing the attack through the night and into the day of the 25th, Colonel James S. Luckett pushed hard to accelerate the enemy collapse. The 1st Battalion had a sharp fight to capture Batterie 'Brommy', the coastal battery of four 155mm guns near Le Béquet north of Tourlaville, but in early afternoon the enemy garrison of 400 finally surrendered. The other two battalions patrolled to the coast. In position blocking the eastern approaches to Cherbourg, the regiment and the division had completed their original mission. Early in the afternoon of June 25, however, General Collins altered the divi-

sion boundary so that the 4th Division could share in the capture of the city. All three battalions of the 12th Infantry entered Cherbourg during the evening. Two battalions cleared the city streets in the eastern portion as far as the limit of the division's zone, hampered only by scattered fire and mines. The 1st Battalion fought all night to reduce pillboxes of beach fortifications east of the Fort des Flamands, but it was not until early the next morning when tanks were brought up that 350 Germans finally decided to surrender. Then at last the 4th Division's part in the capture of Cherbourg was complete.

On the opposite side of the city, the 47th Infantry of the 9th Division was fighting in the suburbs during June 25. After pushing down the ridge toward Octeville with the 39th Infantry, the 47th had turned north in the evening of June 24 to attack Equeurdreville and had pushed one battalion to within 500 yards of the German-held fort of 'Les Couplets' there. The fort was a formidable-appearing position on top of a hill surrounded by a dry moat like a medieval fortress. It was used, however, only as an observation post for the 'Les Couplets' coastal battery on the reverse slope (which had four 155mm guns on open platforms) and was not well defended from the south. In the morning of June 25 the fort was shelled and one company of the 2nd Battalion attacked after a mortar barrage. In 15 minutes the German garrison surrendered. Two companies then pushed rapidly into Equeurdreville and a platoon got to the beach, but it was withdrawn for the night. At the same time the 3rd Battalion reduced the Redoute des Fourches with heavy artillery support. The enemy's right had now collapsed as thoroughly as his left on the day before, although a node of resistance in Octeville held up the 39th Infantry. The 9th Division took more than 1,000 prisoners in the day's fighting.

In the 79th Division zone, just such a fanatic defence was in progress where the garrison of the Fort du Roule south of Cherbourg chose to fight it out. This fort, principal objective of the 79th Division, was one of the most formidable of the Cherbourg bastions. It was built into the face of a rocky promontory above the city and housed four 105mm coastal guns commanding the entire harbour area. The guns were in lower levels under the edge of the cliff. In the upper levels were mortars and machine guns in concrete pillboxes defending the fort from landward attack. On the south-east was an anti-tank ditch.

The Fort du Roule was attacked on the morning of June 25 by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 314th Infantry, after a bombardment by a squadron of P-47s which largely missed its mark and did no appreciable damage. While the guns of the 311th Field Artillery Battalion laid fire on the fort, the 3rd Battalion led off the attack, but was halted at a draw 700 yards from the fort. Here it was greeted with a hail of small-arms fire from enemy dug in on the forward slope. Lacking artillery (which was fully engaged in neutralising the Fort du Roule) the 3rd and 2nd Battalions massed their machine-gun fire on the German line. Most of the defenders were killed and the few survivors retreated to the fort. The 2nd Battalion then took over the attack under the covering fire of the 3rd Battalion. The attackers came under heavy machine-gun fire from pillboxes as well as shelling from the direction of Octeville.

Reduction of the positions now became a matter largely of the courage and initiative of individuals and small groups. Corporal John D. Kelly's platoon of Company E was hugging the ground immobilised by German machine-gun fire from a pillbox. Kelly took a ten-foot pole charge, crawled up the slope through enemy fire, and fixed the charge, but the explosion was ineffective. He returned with another charge and this time blew off



ATB

Looking northwards towards Avenue de Paris, at the junction with Avenue Etienne Lecarpentier. The Divette river, which was the boundary line between the 79th and 9th Divisions, is just across the road. The railway station is off to the left.

the ends of the German machine guns. A third time Kelly climbed the slope, blew open the rear door of the pillbox, and hurled hand-grenades inside until the enemy survivors came out and surrendered. In the 3rd Battalion zone, Company K was stopped by 88mm and machine-gun fire. Here 1st Lieutenant Carlos C. Ogden, who had just taken over the company from its wounded commander, armed himself with rifle- and hand-grenades and advanced alone under fire toward the enemy emplacements. Despite a head wound, Ogden continued up the slope until from a place of vantage he fired a rifle-grenade that destroyed the 88mm gun. With hand-grenades he then knocked out the machine guns, receiving a second wound but enabling his company to resume the advance. Through these acts and others, portions of the German garrison began to surrender. By midnight the 314th Infantry was in possession of the upper defences of the fort. (For these actions, Lieutenant Ogden and Corporal Kelly were awarded the Medal of Honor. Kelly would die of wounds sustained in another action in November 1944 so his award was made posthumously in January 1945.)

The 313th Infantry in the meantime attacked from Gringor into the flats south-east of Cherbourg. Troops entered the outskirts of the city but could not penetrate in strength because they came under fire from guns in the lower levels of the Fort du Roule, still uncaptured.

During the day, fighting had taken place in the vicinity of von Schlieben's command post in an underground shelter at Saint-Sauveur on the southern outskirts of Cherbourg. He radioed: 'Loss of the city shortly is unavoidable . . . 2,000 wounded without a possibility of being moved. Is the destruction of the remaining troops necessary as part of the general picture in view of the failure of effective counter-attacks? Directive urgently requested.'

JUNE 26

The lower levels of the Fort du Roule were finally reduced on the 26th by lowering demolition charges from the top levels; by anti-tank fire from guns in the city, and by the assault of a demolition team under Staff Sergeant Paul A. Hurst around the precipitous west side of the cliff. In the meantime both the 313th and 314th Infantry cleared their zones in the city.

Driven underground by American artillery fire, von Schlieben was now isolated and helpless in his underground shelter and at 1506 hours he sent a final radio message to the 7. Armee: 'Documents burned, codes destroyed.' After that, communications were broken off.



USNA

GIs with a Browning .30 water-cooled machine gun guarding the important road junction of Rue du Val de Saire — the main road leading into Cherbourg from the east (off to the right) — and Avenue Carnot, the thoroughfare leading in from the south (behind the photographer). Bullet marks on the wall are graphic evidence of the heavy fighting that took place at this location.



ATB

The same corner at the same junction, now Place Marie Ravenel.



USNA

GIs taking a ride in a captured tracked carrier in Rue Dom Pedro, a street three blocks north of the Rue du Val de Saire. The vehicle is an ex-French UE tractor, the Germans having seized large numbers of them in 1940.



ATB

The photograph was taken in front of the Hôtel Atlantique (right) which was a special accommodation unit built in the 1920s specifically to house and check on emigrants who were about to depart for a new life in the United States.



USNA

Above: The most dramatic incident of June 26 was the capture of General von Schlieben at his underground shelter at Saint-Sauveur. That morning, Captain Preston O. Gordon, the commander of Company E of the 39th Infantry, sent a prisoner into the tunnel to demand surrender. He received no answer whereupon M-10 tank destroyers were brought forward to fire into the entrances. This photo was taken some time after the capitulation by Signal Corps photographer Sergeant William Spangle. As it happened, Spangle chose exactly the same vantage point as his German counterpart a few days earlier (see page 9).

After a half dozen shots from the TD's 3-inch gun into the rear entrances, which apparently played great havoc, a loud voice called out in German from the front entrance to cease fire. After much difficulty we were able to get all the battalion quiet. I then directed a soldier who could speak German to call and tell them that we would give them two minutes to come out. Instantly, a German with one of the largest white flags I have ever seen ran out followed by a young typical German lieutenant who, I swear, all but goose-stepped. The lieutenant asked to see the ranking officer present. He informed me that the Commanding General of the 709. Infanterie-Division was in the cave and wished to surrender. He requested that I send a staff officer down with him to escort the General to me. In the meantime, the tank destroyer's projectiles had caused so much dust and fumes in the tunnel that the German soldiers, once finding that the white flag had been raised, began to pour out. By actual count later, there were 842 of them. These Germans were in such a rush that they denied the General his wish for a more formal surrender. As he was standing near the entrance, the avalanche of soldiers carried him and his party with it. When the General came up out of the pit to me and told me he was von Schlieben, I damn near dropped dead. When he introduced me to Admiral Hennecke, I thought I was dead.

MAJOR GENERAL MANTON S. EDDY



USNA

Having learnt from a prisoner that von Schlieben's command post was in a subterranean shelter at Saint-Sauveur, the 39th Infantry sent two companies from Octeville to capture him. Advancing through mortar and Nebelwerfer fire they reached the tunnel entrance. A prisoner was sent into the shelter to demand surrender, but the demand was refused. Tank destroyers were then brought up to fire into two of the three tunnel entrances while preparations were made to blow up the stronghold. Causing much dust and smoke in the tunnel, a few rounds were sufficient to bring out the enemy. Some 800 Germans in all, including both Generalleutnant von Schlieben and Konteradmiral Walter Hennecke, Seekommandant Normandie (Naval Commander Normandy), capitulated to General Eddy who just happened to be there. General von Schlieben, however, still concerned with gaining time, declined to make a general surrender of the Cherbourg fortress. The 39th Infantry therefore pushed its attack northward to the coast. In the city, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Gunn, commanding 2nd Battalion, received another surrender of about 400 troops that had barricaded themselves in the City Hall. They gave up when convinced of General von Schlieben's capture and after being promised protection from French snipers.



USNA

Left: Once the white flag was raised, German soldiers began emerging. As we saw on page 9, the left-hand entrance still survives, closed with a gate, but the right-hand main entrance shown here disappeared decades ago when part of the quarry



ATB

gave way. Right: Here the present-day owner of the property explains to Yannick and Jacques Berton how the pile of rocks was first landscaped and it was only later that a chicken coop was constructed on top of it.



USNA

Other Germans of the Cherbourg garrison surrendered to men of the 314th Infantry Regiment on June 27. They are seen here emerging from the underground tunnel system which had been constructed by the French Navy in the 1930s underneath the Roule mountain for bomb-proof workshops and the secure storage of torpedoes.



ATB

The same entrance close to the Avenue de Paris. The subterranean complex is still a naval installation and today houses transmission equipment, though only part of the available space is used. The building near the tunnel entrance, also part of the Navy compound, still stands, albeit mostly abandoned. The new building on the right is a school.



USNA

Left: Dead Germans — ‘machinists’ according to the original caption — were pictured by the Americans inside the underground complex on June 28. Strictly speaking, these lower-level tunnels were not part of the Fort du Roule and it is difficult to determine precisely what role they played in the fighting around the fortified promontory. After the top of the fort was cleared on June 25, the 314th Infantry spent the next day reducing the lower levels and all resistance at the fort was reported finished at about 7 p.m. on June 26, a total of about 300 prisoners having been taken during the battle. However, it would appear that the lowest level was not cleaned out until the next day (as can be seen by the picture at the top of this page). Comprising eight galleries — four on each side of the main tunnel — their exact use by the Germans during the four years of occupation is unclear though by June 1944 the main gallery was principally used as sleeping quarters as it had been fitted out with double bunk beds. We were fortunate that the French Navy granted permission for Major Christophe de Joybert to escort Jean Paul into the Cherbourg installations and through the extensive tunnel complex.



USNA

The Germans had utilised those galleries already fitted out by the French with racks for storing torpedoes, as evidenced by this picture. This is one of the eight side galleries leading off of the main tunnel.



ATB

This is the main tunnel, with the entrance to one of the side galleries on the right. (For a view of these same tunnels under French tenure in 1939, see *After the Battle* No. 146, page 31.)



USNA

Left: Just as Generalmajor Erwin Rommel had done in June 1940 after his capture of Cherbourg (see issue 146, page 32), so Major General J. Lawton Collins, the VII Corps commander, came to the Fort du Roule to inspect his conquest. His visit occurred on June 26, even before the Arsenal, the last German stronghold holding out in the town, had fallen. Clouds of smoke can be seen billowing up from installations where the



ATB

Germans were still busy demolishing stores of oil and ammunition. The largest conflagration, visible in the right background, is in the Arsenal area itself. *Right:* Part of the top is today open to the public but this particular spot lies just inside the fenced-off military area. Having been permitted access, Jean Paul pictured Jacques Berton and Major de Joybert standing in for General Collins and his party.



USNA

Left: The place where Collins stood was above the easternmost of the four German casemates set in the cliff face, with a second one just a short distance to the left (see page 8). Collins first visited the Fort du Roule on the afternoon of June 26 when the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Infantry was still struggling to clear the lower levels of the fort. As he later recalled: 'Even after the upper levels were occupied, the enemy held out below until holes were dynamited in the floors and demolition charges dropped through them. This was still being done when I entered the back door of the fort.' However, Collins soon had to depart when a radio message reached him that the German commanders, General von Schlieben and Admiral Hennecke, had just surrendered and been sent to his command post at the Château de Servigny near Valognes, 20 kilometres to the south. Nevertheless, he returned the following day to complete his visit of the fortress. Here he listens to an explanation given by Captain Robert B. Kirkpatrick of the 79th Division. The divisional insignia on Kirkpatrick's shoulder — a grey Cross of Lorraine on a blue shield with a grey border — was chosen to commemorate the division's fighting in Lorraine during the First World War.



USNA

Left: Collins and a party of soldiers admiring the view over Cherbourg and its immense harbour, pictured by Signal Corps Sergeant Petrony. *Right:* Unfortunately present-day visitors do not have access to the same spot but they can almost achieve the same view from the Musée de la Libération just off to the left.



ATB

Originally opened in 1954 and completely renovated in 1994, the museum covers the history of the Second World War, from the fall of France in 1940 to the liberation in 1944. Spread over two floors, the exhibition presents a series of life-like dioramas covering the occupation and the battles in June 1944.



USNA

Left: By the morning of June 27, there remained only one major German strong point holding out in Cherbourg — the naval Arsenal. General Eddy, the 9th Division commander, was up with the leading battalions of the 47th Infantry, and at 8 a.m., just prior to their attack, he had an ultimatum broadcast to the garrison. At 9.30, Generalmajor Robert Sattler, the German commander, put out the white flag but Eddy refused to accept his capitulation until the German disclosed the whereabouts of mines and booby



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traps within the fort. When Sattler proved unwilling to do this, Eddy threatened to open fire with the guns of his tank destroyers. Finally, at 10 a.m., Colonel George W. Smythe, commander of the 47th Infantry, went forward to receive the surrender, which brought all organised resistance within the city to an end. Here General Eddy leads General Sattler into captivity. *Right:* They stood in front of the Trois Hangars gate, between Bastions 5 and 6, one of the passages through the Arsenal's ramparts.



USNA

General Eddy (now in raincoat and without his glasses) discussing details of the surrender of the Arsenal with an unidentified Hauptmann sporting the Iron Cross, 1st Class.

JUNE 27

In the early hours of June 27, knowing that the fall of the Arsenal was imminent, Fregatkapitän Hermann Witt, the Hafenkommendant Cherbourg (Cherbourg Port Commander), took a party in two boats to escape to the Fort de l'Ouest on the outlying breakwater. He then took charge of the garrison of about 185 men still holding out in that fort and in another stronghold on the breakwater, the Fort du Centre.

The attempt by the 47th Infantry to clear the north-west section of the city had been checked on the 26th by the stubborn defence of the thick-walled Arsenal on whose parapets were emplaced machine guns. Artillery support was rendered difficult by the bad weather and smoke and dust from port demolitions being carried out by the Germans. Assault of the Arsenal was postponed until the morning of June 27 when an elaborately supported three-battalion attack was planned. Before it took place, however, a psychological warfare unit broadcast an ultimatum. At 0830 unarmed men were observed walking on the Arsenal wall and a few minutes later white flags appeared. Colonel George W. Smythe, the 47th Infantry commander, went forward and at 1000 hours Generalmajor Robert Sattler, deputy commander of the Cherbourg fortress, surrendered the 400 men under his immediate control. He stated however that he had no communication with other parts of the Arsenal.



USNA

Left: A party of Organisation Todt workers, mostly Russians, rejoice at the end of the fighting. Trapped in their barrack quarters inside the Arsenal, they survived several days of bombing



ATB

and shelling. *Right:* The same buildings, which lie close to the Trois Hangars gate, remain unchanged although today they are no longer in use.



USNA

Helping their wounded comrades, the last German prisoners are marched away on June 27.

The capitulation of the Arsenal brought to an end all organised resistance in the city. In the preceding day and a half over 10,000 prisoners had been taken, including 2,600 patients and the staffs of two hospitals. However, Fregattenkapitän Witt and his small group were still holding out in the outlying forts along the breakwater. Even stronger defences held out on both sides of the port. In the east the German line ran from Cap Lévy southwards through the Maupertus airfield to Gonnevillle, while west of the city the main line of resistance cut the Cap de la Hague from Gruchy in the north to Vauville in the south, with advance positions from Querqueville to Vauville.

That afternoon, General Collins arrived at the City Hall, together with Major Generals Barton of the 4th Division, Eddy of the 9th Division, Wyche of the 79th Division, Matthew B. Ridgway of the 82d Airborne Division and Maxwell D. Taylor of the 101st Airborne Division, to meet the mayor of the city, Paul Renault, and officially turn Cherbourg over to the French administration.



ATB

The small section of curved wall on the left of the wartime photo belonging to the railway station was the clue which enabled Jean Paul to find the spot on the Avenue de Paris.



USNA



ATB

Left: Civilians watch as a large sign is taken down in front of what was the German 'Soldatenheim' (soldiers' home). Above: This is the Quai de Caligny today, on the western side of the Avant-Port, in front of the Pont Tournant.



USNA

Left: His coat splattered with mud, Generalleutnant von Schlieben arrives at General Collins' headquarters in the Château de Servigny, at Yvetot-Bocage, about three kilometres



ATB

west of Valognes. Following behind are Admiral Hennecke and some of their aides. Right: They were passing the tower at the château's western corner.



USNA



Generalleutnant von Schlieben, der Verteidiger von Cherbourg, verlässt seinen Gefechtsstand im Fort du Roule, um sich den Amerikanern zu ergeben. - Die Lage war hoffnungslos. Auch Schliebens Tod hätte nichts daran ändern können. Deshalb setzte sich Generalleutnant von Schlieben, zusammen mit 18 000 anderen in der gleichen Lage, über den Führerbefehl hinweg, zu dem sie sich mit ihrer Unterschrift verpflichten mussten.

„dass sie ungeachtet der Lage ihren Platz mit Einsatz ihres Lebens bis zum letzten Mann und zur letzten Patrone zu verteidigen hoben.“

Generalleutnant von Schlieben und die 18 000 sind jetzt in England. Sie warten auf das Ende des Krieges und auf ein Deutschland, in dem solche erpresserischen Verpflichtungen unmöglich sind.



ATB

Above left: Hurrying back from the Fort du Roule (see page 19), Collins reached the château some time after the Germans had arrived. His talks with them and the signing of the formal surrender of Cherbourg were held in a room on the first floor. Left: Today the estate is privately owned and although Comte and Comtesse de Pontac very kindly allowed Jean Paul access to the historic room, no visits are normally possible. However, the château itself can be booked for weekly rentals and has eight bedrooms for up to 14 guests (see www.chateau-servigny.fr). Servigny château has a history dating back to Gallo-Roman times. There is a feudal mound in the garden, which was the foundation of the ancient keep, and one tower, complete with arrow slits, still remains of the original manor which was burned down by the English during the Hundred Years War. Parts of the château date back to the early 16th century with later additions over the following 300 years.



USNA

Left: In his autobiography *Lightning Joe*, published in 1979, General Collins described how he demanded of the 'big, hulking' von Schlieben that he surrender all forces under his command. The German refused, saying that 'he had learned from the Russians that even small, scattered units could put up considerable resistance'. Right: Today the room is known as the 'Salon de la Red-



ATB

dition' (Surrender Room) and displays exhibits of that historic day, including a copy of the surrender document and an original leaflet (*below left and opposite*) dropped into the German-held city. On the fifth anniversary of D-Day, General Collins revisited his former headquarters. Below: After his capture at the Arsenal, Generalmajor Sattler was also taken to Collins' headquarters.

DIE NÜCHTERNE WAHRHEIT ÜBER KRIEGSGEFANGENSCHAFT

Deutscher Soldat: Wir versprechen Dir weder Utopien noch das Schlaraffenland, falls Du in Kriegsgefangenschaft gelangst. Aber — auf die folgenden Tatsachen kannst Du mit Bestimmtheit rechnen:

1. „FAIRE“ BEHANDLUNG, wie es einem tapferen Gegner gebührt. Der Rang des Gefangenen wird anerkannt. Deine eigenen Kameraden sind Deine unmittelbaren Vorgesetzten.
2. GUTE VERPFLEGUNG. Viele Deiner Kameraden sind erkrankt, wie gut die Ernährung bei uns ist. Wir beißen mit Recht die bestgenährte Armee der Welt. (Frische Ländler ziehen das deutsche Kommissbrot unserem Weisbrot vor, aber über unseren Kaffee und die Zubereitung unserer Speisen hat sich noch niemand beklagt. . .)
3. ERSTKLASSIGE LAZARETTPFLEGE für Verwundete und Kranke. Gemäss der Genfer Konvention erhalten Gefangene dieselbe Lazarettpflege wie unsere eigenen Truppen.
4. SCHREIBGELEGENHEIT. Du kannst im Monat drei Briefe und vier Karten nach Hause schreiben. Die Postverbindung ist schnell und zuverlässig. Du kannst Briefe und auch Pakete erhalten.
5. BESOLDUNG. Gemäss der Genfer Konvention behält der Kriegsgefangene das Anrecht auf seine Entlohnung bei. Für etwaige freiwillige Arbeitsleistungen erhältst Du aber selbstverständlich Bezahlung. Für das Geld, das Du erhältst, kannst Du verschiedene Marktenderwaren kaufen.
6. WEITERBILDUNG. Sollte der Krieg noch länger dauern, dann kommst Du wahrscheinlich noch dazu, Dich an den verschiedensten Bildungs- und Lehrkursen zu beteiligen, die von Kriegsgefangenen selbst veranstaltet werden.

Und selbstverständlich kommst Du nach Kriegsende nach Hause

20.30



USNA



USNA

With eyes downcast, Sattler awaits the arrival of Collins.



ATB

The picture was taken in a ground-floor room of the château.



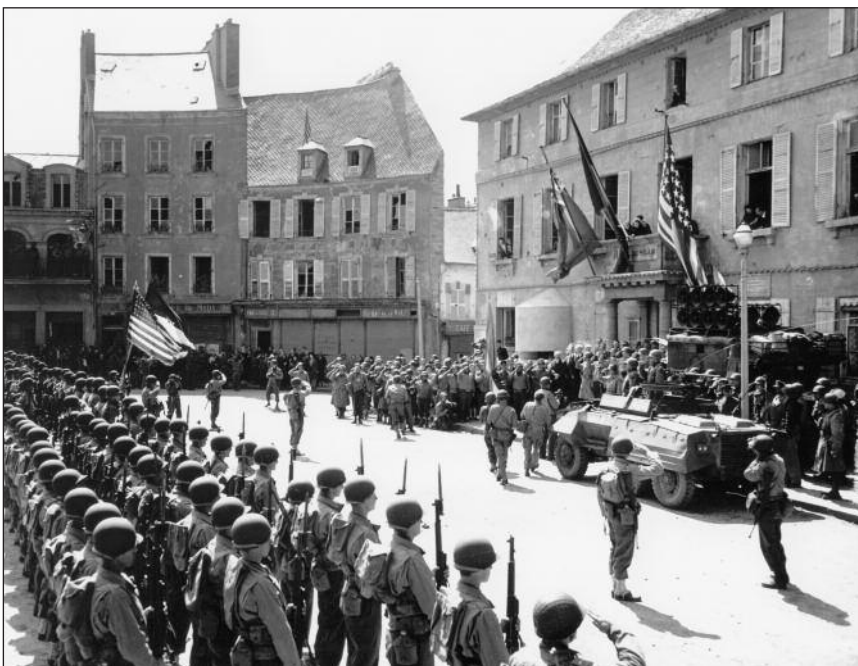
USNA

On the afternoon of June 27, in a moving ceremony in front of the city hall, General Collins formally returned Cherbourg to French civil control, presenting the Tricolour to Mayor Paul



ATB

Renault in the presence of the commanders representing the five American divisions that had made the liberation of the city possible.



USNA

REDUCING THE FINAL STRONG POINTS

All organised resistance north-east of Cherbourg ceased on June 28 when Major Friedrich Wilhelm Küppers agreed to discuss a surrender of the 1,000 men under his command with General Barton of the 4th Division. That same morning, the outlying forts on the breakwater were dive-bombed by nine P-47s of the Ninth Air Force and artillery opened up at them. The fighter-bombers returned the next morning and heavier artillery fire hammered the forts until the Fort du Centre surrendered, followed in the afternoon by the Fort de l'Ouest where the badly wounded Fregattenkapitän Witt was captured. (He was awarded the Knight's Cross on September 24.)

West of Cherbourg, the final clearing of Cap de la Hague began on June 29 when the 9th Division attacked with the 47th Infantry advancing up the north coast, the 60th Infantry

Left: As Collins recalled in his memoirs: 'Speaking in halting French, I said simply that we Americans were proud to return to our sister republic its first city to be liberated by the Allies. Renault replied eloquently, expressing the gratitude of his townspeople at being free from Nazi control, and pledged eternal friendship of France for America.'



USNA

Left: Lined up behind Renault and Collins are (L-R) Major Generals Ira T. Wyche (79th Division), Raymond O. Barton (4th Division), Matthew B. Ridgway (82nd Airborne), Manton Eddy (9th Division) and Maxwell D. Taylor (101st Airborne). After the ceremony, Renault invited the Americans into the council hall for a glass of champagne. As Collins recalled: 'On the way in, Billy



ATB

Wyche provided a break in the relative solemnity of the occasion. "Joe", he said, "I didn't know you spoke French. I could understand every word you said!" "That's bad news, Billy", I replied, "because if the Americans could understand me, the Frenchmen could not.' Right: With fitting seriousness, Jacques Berton stands in for Mayor Renault on the city hall steps.



USNA

Another parade was held in Cherbourg on June 30 when Silver Stars were awarded to men of the 12th Infantry, 4th Division.

in the centre, and the 4th Cavalry Group on the left. Resistance was encountered but the attackers quickly drove right up to the tip of the cape, clearing out strong points and rounding up prisoners. The mop-up finally netted about 6,000 prisoners, the senior German commander, Oberstleutnant Keil, being captured about midnight on June 30.

In the battle for the Cotentin and Cherbourg, VII Corps had suffered a total of over 22,000 casualties, including 2,800 killed, 5,700 missing, and 13,500 wounded. The Germans had lost 39,000 men taken prisoner in addition to an undetermined number of men killed.

From the German point of view, the fall of Cherbourg had come much sooner than expected. The denial of French ports to the Allies formed a major part of German tactical planning and the German command had anticipated that, even if the Cotentin peninsula was isolated and reinforcements were prevented from reaching the Cherbourg fortress, it could still hold out for several weeks (as Brest was to do later). Hitler took the quick capitulation of Cherbourg badly, and thereafter in Nazi circles von Schlieben was held up as an example of a very poor commander.



ATB

The Place de la République today. The city hall can be seen further down the street.



USNA

Left: Another award ceremony for the 4th Division, this time on July 3 and held in the forecourt of the Hôtel Atlantique on Rue Dom Pedro. Right: The hotel had closed in 1934 because the level of emigration to the United States had fallen, a conse-



ATB

quence of the world economic crisis of 1929. Before then, over 250,000 had passed through it so it is quite possible that one of the GIs lined up here could have been a son of one of them. The building now houses Cherbourg's chamber of commerce.



USNA

When it was captured, Cherbourg harbour presented a dismal and discouraging sight with demolished buildings, ruined quays and sunken ships and barges everywhere. However, this tower was not the 'ruins of a fort' as claimed by the original Signal Corps caption but the remains of the large crane used to lower seaplanes into water at the French Chantereyne naval air base (see issue 146, page 30).



USNA

Above: Another shot of the demolished crane, giving a perfect comparison as the foundation still remains (below).



ATB



USNA

Detailed reconnaissance of the harbour by the American engineers and naval personnel soon showed that 95 per cent of the existing quays capable of handling deep-draft shipping had been destroyed. Above: The Gare Maritime was badly damaged and its utilities completely put out of action. Notwithstanding these tremendous difficulties, over the next couple of weeks Cherbourg was slowly brought back into operation, achieving a discharge rate of more than double the goal originally set by the 'Overlord' planners and, until Antwerp became available in late November, it remained the main port supporting the US forces. Left: No longer a railway station, the approaches to the Gare Maritime were landscaped and trees now hide the open view of 1944.

REHABILITATION OF THE PORT

Even before the last harbour forts surrendered on June 29, American engineers and naval personnel had begun detailed reconnaissance of the extent of damage to the port. What they found was not encouraging. Colonel Alvin G. Viney, who prepared the original engineer plan for port rehabilitation, wrote: 'The demolition of the port of Cherbourg is a masterful job, beyond a doubt the most-complete, intensive and best-planned demolition in history.' The harbour was strewn with a variety of different types of mines. All basins in the military and commercial port were blocked with sunken ships. The Gare Maritime, containing the electrical control system and heating plant for the port, was demolished and 20,000 cubic yards of masonry were blown into the large deep basin (Darse Transatlantique) that had been used in peacetime for docking Atlantic liners. The entrance of this basin was completely blocked by two large ships. Quay walls were severely damaged. Cranes were demolished in all areas. The left breakwater in the inner harbour (Jetée du Homet) was



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USNA

The Gare Maritime — the pride of Cherbourg — with the Darse Transatlantique basin and the Quai de France on the left. The entrance to the Port de Commerce (right) has been blocked by sinking the coaster *Le Normand* in the Avant-Port.

cratered so that the sea poured through. The whole port was as nearly a wreck as demolitions could make it. For this work of destruction, Hitler awarded the Knight's Cross to Admiral Hennecke the day after his capture by VII Corps troops, calling the job 'a feat unprecedented in the annals of coastal defence'.

Planning estimates based on experience at Naples had calculated that Cherbourg could begin operations three days after its capture. In reality it was almost three weeks before the port was opened at all and months before

it began to handle cargo in quantity. The minesweeping of the western portion of the harbour was not completed until July 14, and not until the end of September were all the obstructions cleared from the harbour. The work of reconstructing port facilities began before the last forts had surrendered. The advance party of the US 1056th Engineer Port Construction and Repair Group arrived in Cherbourg on June 27. The first task was the clearing of a beach area (the Nouvelle Plage), a fashionable bathing beach in peacetime, now designed by the engineers for use

by DUKW amphibious trucks. But the first cargo was landed by DUKWs over this beach only on July 16.

Little by little the port capacity was increased until in November Cherbourg handled more than half of all the cargo landed in France for the American armies, discharging 433,201 tons, or an average of about 14,500 tons a day. This compared with a pre-D-Day planning of 8,500 tons a day. Most dramatically it contrasted to a total peacetime cargo handling for the entire year of 1937 of only 325,150 tons.



USNA

Left: The 4th Port Headquarters of the US Transportation Corps, which operated the harbour, used the Flak bunker on top of this casemate to operate a maritime service office. During the battle, the two casemates on the mole had been manned by the 3. Batterie of Marine-Artillerie-Abteilung 260.



ATB

Note the 105mm gun still in position. That particular casemate was demolished in order to clear a passage to move the submarine *Le Redoutable* into the Cité de la Mer (see issue 146, page 38) but the second casemate (above), seen on the left in the photo at the top of the page, still survives.

