

concentrated 2 hour bomber and fighter-bomber attack on the pyramidal forts ringing Cherbourg; and the historic operations south of St. Lo.

On 2 July, General Weyland's field headquarters were set up at Cricqueville in Normandy. A few days later he moved to Nehou, near the secret command post of the still secret Third Army. Until 1 August, while XIX TAC's Thunderbolts and Mustangs continued to fly in cooperation with the First Army, the operations and intelligence personnel of XIX TAC and Third Army made plans for their independent air-ground campaign, to start with the activation of General Patton's forces.

Background of the Third Army The Third Army had been in Germany before. Its shoulder patch, a white "A" and red "O" on a field of blue, proclaimed months spent in the Reich after the last war as the army of occupation. From the outset, General Patton made no secret of the fact that the Third Army would again go to Germany.

He had taken command of the army in England on 26 March 1944. Until 6 July he directed a rigorous training program, emphasizing the physical fitness of his men, aircraft recognition, firing of individual and combined weapons, and familiarity with mines, minefields, and booby traps.

On 6 July General Patton established headquarters at Nehou in Normandy. Under his command were four corps, the VIII, XII, XV, and XX. When the Third Army became operational on 1 August, it had three immediate objectives: to

drive south and southwest from Avranches, to secure the area around Rennes and Fougères, and then to wheel westward to capture the peninsula of Brittany and open the Breton ports.

First Phase of the operation On 1 August, American armor and infantry were smashing forward on the impetus of the breakthrough at St. Lo. The surge of five armored columns cut the Germans to ribbons. Dozens of powerless, unequipped, and disorganized enemy units were scrambling southward and eastward to escape annihilation. Fighters of the XIX and IX TAC hunted the foe on the roads, where they moved two and three trucks abreast without discipline in planless escape; in the undergrowth in valleys and stream beds, where Panther and Tiger tanks and isolated artillery sought refuge; in bivouac areas, where Germans pitched their oblong tents for a few hours' respite in their headlong flight.

This sudden rout followed the massive air operation of 25 July, which helped to break the month-old deadlock along the base of the Cotentin peninsula. From the capture of Cherbourg until that date, Americans and Germans had fought obdurately around St. Lo, Periers, and Lessay. When the shattering aerial attack finally came, the massed weight of American heavy, medium, light, and fighter-bombers, about 3,000 strong, saturated German anti-armor defenses with thousands of small bombs, each with a lethal radius of 100 yards. After that the enemy lines were numbed, dislocated, shredded. The First Army sprang forward before the Germans could recover their balance. In a week the Army reached Avranches. Its cooperating air power stopped hundreds of tanks and vehicles along the roads, throwing into confusion seven nervously withdrawing divisions. At Avranches, on 1 August, the Third Army entered the fight.

Do not blow up any bridges General Patton's request to XIX TAC. Since long before D-day tactical aircraft had concentrated on bridge-busting, a very effective way of slowing German movement. General Patton looked at it another way. He wanted the bridges intact so that his own troops could cross the rivers without delay, without having to ford them, or to throw up pontoon bridges. He counted on swift advance and made it. Within 5 days all Brittany except Brest, St. Malo, Ile de Cézembre, and Lorient were in American hands.

The very speed of Third Army movement changed the whole character of fighter-bomber cooperation. Before the breakthrough, the highest priority assignment for Thunderbolts, Mustangs, and Lightnings had been the isolation of the battlefield from the south, east, and north. That assignment presupposed that advance would be slow and tortuous, that it was advantageous to demolish permanent road and river structures like bridges, embankments, and overpasses to stop the enemy from flooding the battle zone with troops and supplies. When General Patton started moving, he turned the interdiction job inside out. The Third Army wanted fighter-bombers

to prevent movement from, not to, the battle area. It wanted the German escape roads blocked, but it also wanted lines of communication ahead of our troops as smooth and fluid as possible.

Before the big air blow of 25 July, the second highest priority assignment for air, as the First Army fought stubbornly from hill to hill and patiently stormed strong points, had been to attack enemy

defensive positions which had held out for days and might continue for weeks. Thunderbolts would plan, 24 to 48 hours in advance, to dive-bomb a stubborn machine gun position or a fort impregnable from the ground.

In XIX TAC-Third Army tactics, the second job also was reversed. There were no such things as German "strong points" in Brittany short of the great island and port fortresses. Over the open country of the peninsula the Germans rarely paused long enough to make a stand on Hill X or Ridge Y. It became impossible to plan tactical air cooperation missions a day in advance when Third Army tanks rolled ahead 20 miles a day and when aircraft had to make sure, before an attack, that the objective had not already been taken by our ground forces. It soon became clear that in cooperating with General Patton, XIX TAC would find its targets in the field, would plan as it flew.

To cut off enemy lines of retreat, to destroy German tanks and infantry in flight, to eliminate pockets of resistance and delaying action, General Weyland planned and dispatched two extremely flexible types of missions which depended heavily upon the acuteness and resourcefulness of his individual airmen.

One was armed reconnaissance. In these operations, fighter bombers armed with bombs and bullets ransack deep and shallow zones ahead of the ground forces for targets of opportunity. The field for armed reconnaissance is bounded on the inside by the bomb line, a series of marked terrain features, beyond which all territory is definitely held by the enemy. With General Patton's amazingly swift ground advance, the bomb line moved hour by hour and pilots carried area maps strapped to their legs so that they could be alerted about changes as they were made. In the campaign for Brit-

