

# **Study Instructions and Core Reading**

## **Battle of Carentan, Normandy**

### **Consolidating the Omaha and Utah Lodgments**

#### **(7 to 13 June 1944)**

#### **Virtual Staff Ride**

**The Battle of Carentan, 7 to 13 June 1944:** This Army University Press-Combat Studies Institute virtual staff ride examines the actions of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV) at the Battle of Carentan, France (9-13 June 1944). After the successful landings on 6 June 1944 there was serious danger that the enemy would drive a wedge into the gap between V Corps at Omaha Beach and VII Corps at Utah Beach. LTG J. Lawton Collins (VII Corps) IAW guidance from U.S. First Army and General Eisenhower directed the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV to capture the important road junction city of Carentan and consolidate the U.S. lodgment into one continuous beachhead. The VSR examines the division's fight to capture the city in a fight against the heavily reinforced *6th Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment* (7-12 June 1944). The staff ride then looks at the German counterattack to retake the city using the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* (12-13 June) against the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV reinforced with elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.

This 3-hour virtual staff ride is the seventh module of the Normandy Staff Rides.

- This material is designed to assist in preparing for the virtual staff ride. The readings provide context for the operation and give the participants the details of the operations that will be covered during the virtual staff ride. It is highly recommended that participants read all the assigned material.
- The staff ride is not a lecture; it is a facilitated discussion. The better prepared the participants are, the better the staff ride will go.

#### **All participants must read and study:**

- The Battle of Carentan (attached)
- Carentan Staff Ride Maps (attached)
- Supplemental readings as assigned by role (detailed guidance and supplemental readings are provided as a separate file)

#### **Role playing:**

- The Combat Studies Institute recommends each staff ride participant be assigned a specific unit, or role, to research and discuss during the field study phase. If there are more than 7

participants, small groups may be formed to study each role. The 502d PIR group should be the largest group; it has the most material to cover.

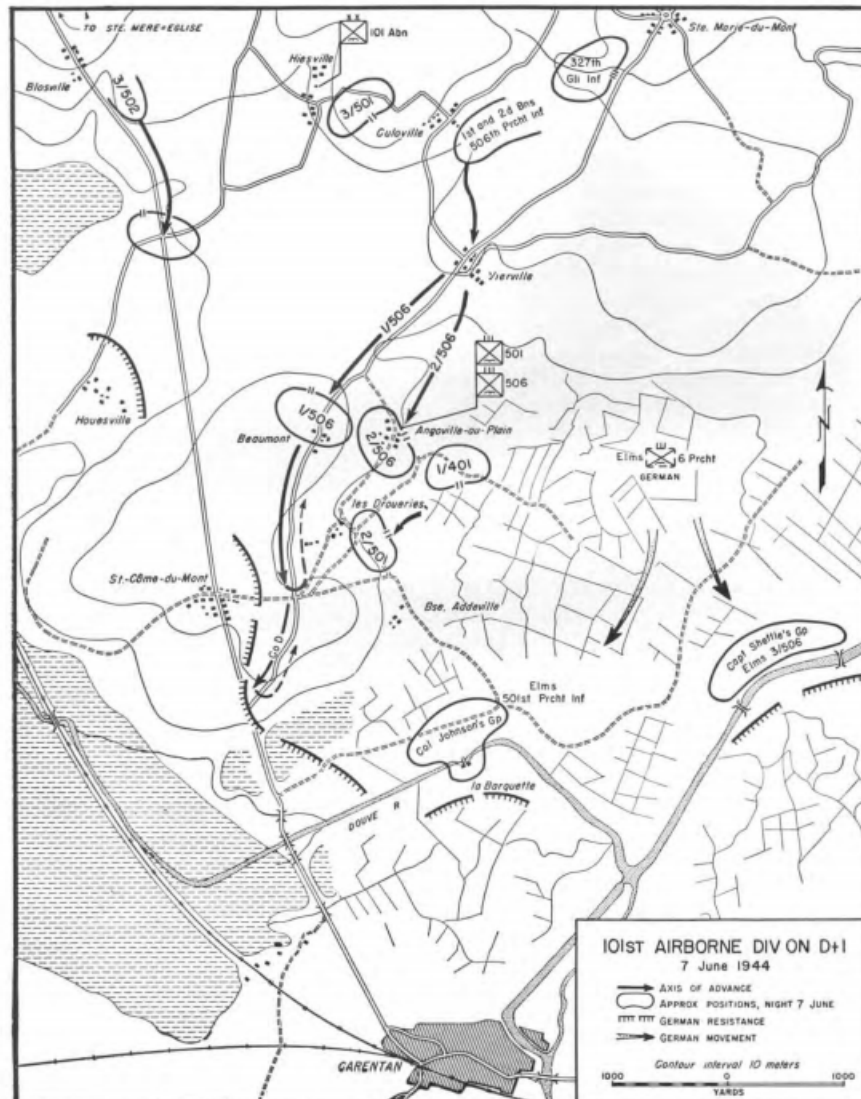
- During the field study phase, participants, who have become “mini experts” on their roles will discuss the actions and decisions from both their own and their assigned focus. They should be prepared to discuss:
  - Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
  - Key decisions, why those decisions were made, and the consequence of the decision.
  - Unit’s actions and accomplishments.
  
- Roles:
  - **Assignment #1: The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Headquarters (101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV) and 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (501<sup>st</sup> PIR).**
  - **Assignment #2: The 6<sup>th</sup> Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment (6<sup>th</sup> FJR).**
  - **Assignment #3: The 502<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (502d PIR).**
  - **Assignment #4: The 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (506<sup>th</sup> PIR).**
  - **Assignment #5: The 327<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment (327<sup>th</sup> GIR).**
  - **Assignment #6: The 17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division (17<sup>th</sup> PzGD)**
  - **Assignment #7: Combat Command A, 2d Armored Division (CCA, 2d AD).**

# THE BATTLE OF CARENTAN (6-14 JUNE)

## THE BATTLE OF CARENTAN (7 JUNE)

Excerpt from CMH Pub 7-4-1, *Cross Channel Attack: 76-93*.

On D-day ad-hoc elements of all three of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division's parachute regiments had secured the beach exits in support of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's landing at Utah Beach. Additionally, elements of the 3/506<sup>th</sup> seized the bridges at Le Port and established a small bridgehead over the Douve River. Col. Howard Johnson (501<sup>st</sup> PIR) and disparate group of paratroopers had also seized "The Lock" at Barquette and established another bridgehead on the Douve River. About one kilometer north of "The Lock," LTC Robert Ballard (2/501<sup>st</sup>) with improvised group of paratroopers was trying to fight his way through Les Droueries to the bridge over the Douve near St. Come-du-Mont (See Map No. 13).



MAP NO. 13

However, due to radio failures, General Maxwell Talyor was unaware of the accomplishments on the Douve River. Since capture of the Douve bridges was one of the most important of the division's missions, on which depended the immediate security of VII Corps on the south and ultimate junction with V Corps, General Taylor decided on the afternoon of D Day to send the 506th Parachute Infantry (less the 3d Battalion) south on a reconnaissance in force. The reconnaissance, which in fact became an attack, led off on the morning of 7 June in column down the road from Culoville. Though harassed by scattered rifle fire, the 506th reached Vierville without undue delay, cleared the town, and then split, with the 1st Battalion heading down the highway to Beaumont and the 2d diverging cross country to the left toward Angouville-au-Plain. Halted just beyond Vierville by heavy small arms fire, the attacks broke loose only after a platoon of medium tanks had been brought up and attached to the 2d Battalion. The 1st Battalion fought its way down astride the highway to Beaumont where it was stopped by two enemy counterattacks. In the attack, LTC Turner, Commander 1/506th and a former armor officer, commandeered one of the tanks and he personally led the attack from the TC hatch. However, the attack stalled when a sniper shot and killed him.

The 2d Battalion with medium and light tanks was sent to its support and they advanced another 1,000 yards to just east of St. Come-du-Mont. Company D, 2/506 with a M5 tank in the lead passed through and seized the crossroads south of St. Come-du-Mont. However, their attack faltered when the lead tank was knocked out. Supposedly one of the dead crewman remained in the tank for several days and the 101st referred to the crossroads as Dead Man's Corner. Before falling back, Dog Co. rescued a column of supply trucks that was serenely parked at the crossroad and was miraculously unbothered by the Germans in the area.

At the same time that the 506th Infantry was attacking south, the 2d Battalion of the 501<sup>st</sup> Infantry, which on D Day had fought an isolated and inconclusive action around les Droueries, continued its attempt to push westward into St. Come-du-Mont, still held in some force by two battalions under von der Heydte's command. This attack, coordinated in early afternoon with Colonel Sink, commanding the 506th Infantry, and supported by six medium tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion and the guns of the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, made substantial headway. But it was a typical Normandy battle-cleaning out dug-in enemy riflemen and machine gun positions from the hedgerows field by field. The battalion did not get far enough west to tie in with the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry. The latter was therefore ordered to withdraw to Beaumont and all units held during the night, reorganizing for resumption of the attack the next day.

### **THE BATTLE OF CARENTAN (8-14 JUNE)**

Excerpt from CMH Pub 100-12, *Utah Beach to Cherbourg*: 76-93.

The early joining of the Utah and Omaha beachheads had acquired an added urgency as a result of the difficulties in the V Corps area. Neither corps had made as rapid progress as hoped. Considerable anxiety existed, especially in the V Corps sector, where only a precarious foothold had been won on Omaha Beach on D Day and determined enemy resistance prevented an early consolidation of the beachhead. There was serious danger that the enemy would attempt to drive a wedge into the gap between V and VII Corps, particularly if he were allowed time to bring up reserves. General Eisenhower, viewing the situation on a visit to the Omaha area on 7 June,



MAP NO. 15

ordered a concentrated effort to close this gap. General Bradley accordingly gave first priority to this mission of linking the two beachheads and issued the necessary directives to the two corps. V Corps was ordered to thrust westward through Isigny; VII Corps was to seize Carentan. The latter mission fell naturally to the 101st Airborne Division, already engaged along the southern flank of the Utah sector. In temporarily diverting the main effort of the VII Corps, General Bradley even suggested to General Collins that the 101st Airborne Division be reinforced should it be unable to break through to join up with units from V Corps, and indicated

his immediate concern over the fusion of the two beachheads by specifically assigning first priority to this mission.

***St. Come-du-Mont***  
***(8 June 1944)***

The 101st Airborne Division was already engaged in efforts to dislodge the enemy from St. Come-du-Mont when these new orders were received by the VII Corps commander. The new attack on St. Come-du-Mont was scheduled for 0445 on 8 June. It was to be led by Colonel Sink of the 506th Parachute Infantry and was to be made by four battalions (Map No. 15). On the right the 1st and 2d Battalions, 506th Parachute Infantry, were to drive directly from Beaumont to St. Come-du-Mont. In the center the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry, was to advance from north of les Droueries to the main highway south of St. Come-du-Mont. On the left the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was to move through Colonel Ballard's force east of les Droueries, and as the entire attack approached St. Come-du-Mont it was to slant off to the south and go down the highway to blow the causeway bridge.

Preceded by effective preparatory fires on fifteen registered targets, the attack got off to a good start. The 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry, cleared les Droueries and advanced rapidly southward. As it approached the intersection east of St. Come-du-Mont, it was threatened with being pinched off by the convergence of the 506th Parachute Infantry units on the right and the glider battalion on the left. A reorganization was effected and the 1st and 2d Battalions, 506th Parachute Infantry, were ordered to move to the west and set up defensive positions on the east of St. Come-du-Mont. The glider battalion lagged behind on the left, while the 3d Battalion of the 501st went on and reached the Carentan highway, just north of the Beaumont road intersection, about midmorning.

Colonel Ewell, commanding the 3d Battalion, thought he saw signs of the enemy's withdrawal westward from St. Come-du-Mont, and he decided to go south along the Carentan highway to seize the causeway and the bridges. But as his men moved onto the highway they were met by small-arms, machinegun, and antitank fire from the buildings near the first bridge, and 88-mm. guns in Carentan began to shell them. Since no communications with the American artillery were available, Ewell's battalion pulled back to the east of the highway. As it withdrew, the battalion was suddenly faced by a German counterattack from the north. The counterattack was repulsed, but an additional effort was needed to clear the enemy from a small hill which dominated the highway on the west. With this hill as an anchor, the battalion built up an east-west line facing north. From this line Colonel Ewell's men beat back five successive German thrusts, each of which approached within one hedgerow of the American positions.

In the middle of the afternoon, the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was ordered by Colonel Sink to go in between Colonel Ewell and the 506th Parachute Infantry. But by the time it had moved up, the enemy had begun to withdraw. The two American battalions started in pursuit, but did not regain contact, although the enemy could be seen moving south between the railroad embankment to the west and the highway. About forty loaded wagons were captured on the highway.

A patrol found that the enemy's withdrawal had left St. Come-du-Mont completely clear. The 101st Division could now prepare to move south to attack the four causeway bridges, the second of which had been blown earlier in the afternoon by the enemy.

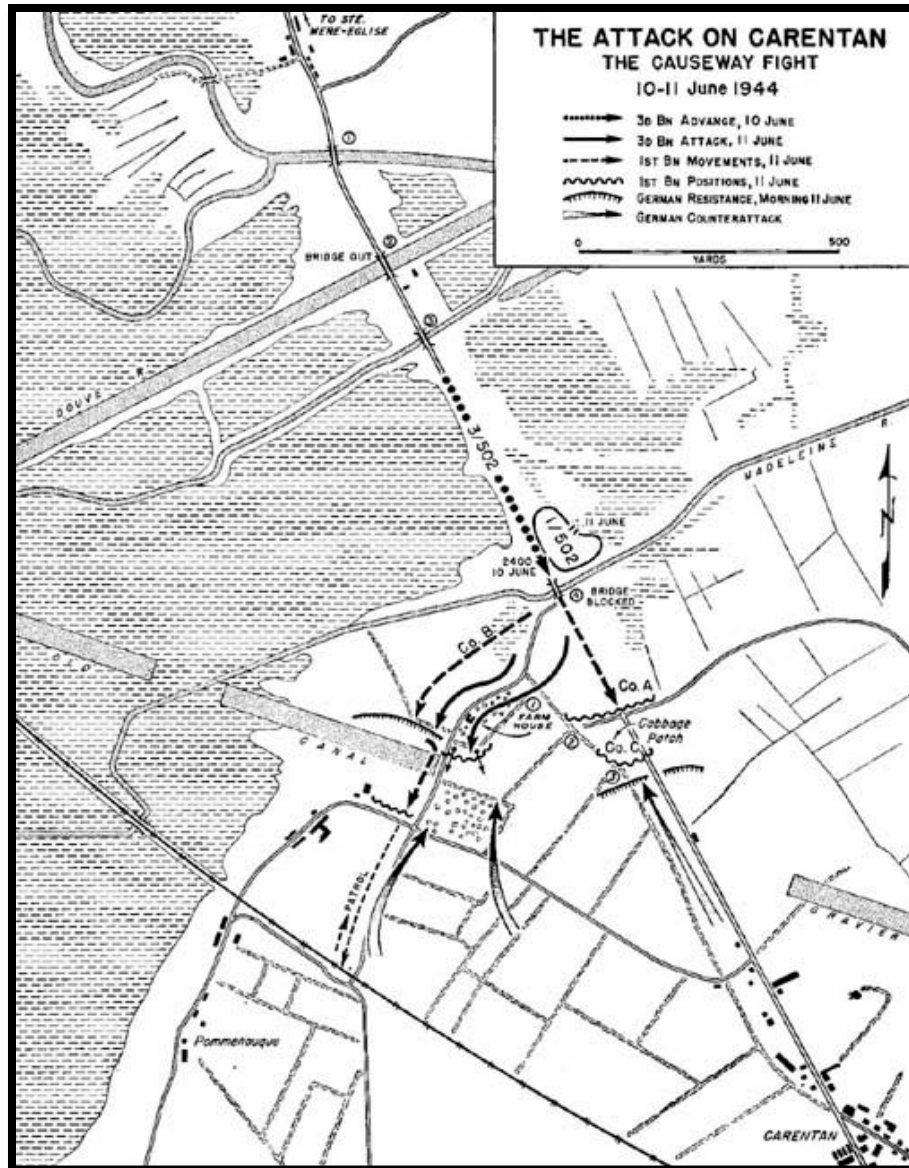
***The Causeway Attack***  
***(10-11 June 1944)***

By evening of 8 June, the 101st Airborne Division had occupied a defensive arc on the southern flank of the VII Corps from Chef-du-Pont to the mouth of the Douve. The 502d Parachute Infantry, after accomplishing its missions in the Foucarville area, had taken positions on the right flank of the division, from Chef-du-Pont to the vicinity of Houesville. The 327th Glider Infantry, which had arrived by sea, relieved Colonel Johnson's and Captain Shettle's men in the vicinity of the lock and the le Port bridges. The 506th Parachute Infantry held the center, astride the Carentan highway, while the 501st Parachute Infantry was assembled near Vierville as division reserve.

The plan of the 101st Division provided for two crossings of the Douve. The left wing, starting at 0100 on 10 June, was to cross in the vicinity of Brevands; part of this force was to join V Corps near the Vire River bridge southwest of Isigny, while the main force was to drive southwest to seize Carentan. The right wing was to cross the causeway northwest of Carentan, bypass Carentan, and seize Hill 30, southwest of the city. Capture of Hill 30 would put the Americans astride the principal German escape route from Carentan, as movement to the south and east was hindered by the Vire-Taute Canal and extensive swampland. As the battle for Carentan developed, the left and right wings of the division were coordinated to form a ring about the town, and within this ring a pincers closed in on the town itself.

With St. Come-du-Mont clear, the division's right wing was ready to begin its attack across the causeway. There were indications that Carentan was not heavily defended. On 8 June Colonel Sink of the 506th Parachute Infantry had outposted the first two bridges across the causeway after the enemy's withdrawal from St. Come-du-Mont, and on the following day he made a reconnaissance to the outskirts of Carentan; in the vicinity of the fourth bridge he drew fire (Map No. 16). Airplane reconnaissance reported that Carentan had been evacuated and also that a big gap had been blown in the railway embankment, thus making the causeway the only practicable approach to Carentan. Straight and narrow, the causeway rises some six to nine feet above the marshes and spans the Douve and Madeleine Rivers and the two Douve canals. Any attack would thus be canalized and expose the infantry to fire from the front and both flanks. On either side the marshes extend out of rifle range. With the western bank of the causeway falling away sharply to the water's edge, only the more gradually sloping eastern bank offered an opportunity to dig in.

The attack was to be carried out by the 502d Parachute Infantry. The 3d Battalion (Colonel Cole) started out shortly after midnight, 9-10 June. But the inability of the engineers, working under



MAP NO. 16

fire, to repair Bridge No. 2 caused the attack to be postponed. Shortly after midnight a patrol, led by Lt. Ralph B. Gehauf, set out to reconnoiter the road. The patrol crossed the canal at Bridge No. 2 in a boat and proceeded to Bridge No. 4. At this point the men were forced to edge single file through a narrow opening left by a heavy Belgian Gate which had been drawn almost completely across the bridge, and which they could budge only about eighteen inches. When they had gone about fifty yards beyond the bridge a mortar shell dropped near them, flares went up, and then machine guns and more mortars fired on them. The fire came from the front and right front, the first indication that the Germans were in positions on the highway and on the higher ground directly south and west of the highway. At about 0530 the patrol withdrew.

The battalion was then told that the attack would be launched in the afternoon, with considerable artillery support, principally from the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. self-

propelled guns) and the 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (75-mm. pack howitzers). Most of the artillery fire was laid on the suspected and known enemy positions southwest of Bridge No. 4. At noon the engineers had still not spanned the 12-foot gap at Bridge No. 2, but Colonel Cole and three other men improvised a footbridge with engineer planking, enabling the battalion to start crossing in single file in the middle of the afternoon. From Carentan an 88-mm. gun continued to interdict the causeway, but it did not stop the movement and caused no casualties. The men moved low or crawled along the embankment. At the end of three hours, when the point of the battalion had crossed three of the bridges and most of the men were beyond Bridge No. 2, the enemy opened fire from the hedgerows and a large farmhouse to the right front. The men in the point hit the ditches. As they attempted to move forward, an enemy machine gun behind a hedgerow only a hundred yards away searched the ditches, and, after three men were hit, the group withdrew.

The battalion, extended in a long thin column on the road and, unable to maneuver to either flank, was under enemy small-arms fire along its whole length. To advance, it had to send one man at a time to rush the Belgian Gate at Bridge No. 4 and slip through the narrow opening under direct enemy fire. The whole precarious maneuver would have been impossible without artillery support, which worked over German positions from 1600 to 2330 and undoubtedly reduced the effectiveness of enemy fire. Part of Company G, which was leading the battalion, deployed to the left of Bridge No. 4, while the rest of the company tried to cross the bridge through the narrow opening. Six men edged through; the seventh was hit and the company stopped to build up a fire position. Three mortars were also brought up and they worried over the German-held ground.

Still the battalion could not advance. Company I, exposed on the right bank near Bridge No. 3 where men had no grass for concealment and could not dig in, was hard hit, first by enemy rifle fire and later (at 2330) by two planes that bombed and strafed its positions. The strafing in particular took a heavy toll and, when it was over, 21 men and 2 officers of the company's original 80 moved back behind Bridge No. 2. About midnight, during a lull in the firing Company H started moving men through the gate at Bridge No. 4.

At 0400 on 11 June, Regiment ordered the 3d Battalion to continue the attack, and in the darkness Company G and Headquarters Company followed Company H across Bridge No. 4. The battalion deployed along both sides of the highway. The center of the enemy's positions appeared to be a large farmhouse, flanked by hedgerows, on the higher ground which rises out of the marshes on the right-hand side of the road.

When the leading scouts on the right approached the farmhouse, they were fired on by rifles, machine guns, and mortars. In an attempt to neutralize the position, an artillery concentration was placed on the area but had no perceptible effect. Colonel Cole then ordered a bayonet charge on the farmhouse and called across the road to Maj. John P. Stopka, the battalion executive officer, to have the order passed along. Artillery put down smoke in a wide arc around the objective. At 0615, as the artillery fire was lifted, Colonel Cole blew his whistle and led the charge. Of the 250 men who should have followed him only 20 got up to go; another 50 followed Major Stopka. In the confusion and excitement, with the men widely distributed and hugging the ground, the order had not been passed around. Some of the men never received it; others had only a vague idea by hearing a word or two. In addition, parts of Company G, in the meadow

east of the road to Carentan, became involved with enemy troops, armed with machine pistols. The commanding officer of the company was hit by an artillery short during the action. Most of the men of Company G did not hear the whistle at all, but when they saw the attack they ran after the others, trying to catch up.

Despite the initial disorder, the men charged across a ditch into the fire-swept field east of the farmhouse. The men, closely bunched, followed Colonel Cole and Major Stopka, and Colonel Cole stopped several times to get them to fan out. Two men of Company H reached the farmhouse first and found it abandoned, but to the west on higher ground the enemy still occupied rifle pits and machine-gun emplacements along a hedgerow running at right angles to the road. Under the momentum of the charge the men also secured this objective and eliminated the Germans with grenades and bayonets. The enemy's main defense was thus broken, but he still held ground to the south from which he continued to fire on the American positions. Colonel Cole wished to take advantage of the enemy's disorganization and keep the attack moving, but the 3d Battalion was in no condition to push on. All of the men in the battalion managed to cross the causeway and assemble near the farmhouse, but units were badly mixed and had suffered heavy casualties. Word was therefore sent to the rear to ask the 1st Battalion, 502d Parachute Infantry, to come up and pass through the 3d and continue the attack south to the high ground at la Billonerie (Hill 30).

The 1st Battalion (Colonel Cassidy) was north of Bridge No. 4 when it received Colonel Cole's message. It crossed the bridge under heavy fire and deployed across the fields toward the house. Instead of relieving the 3d Battalion, however, it reinforced it to help secure the ground gained. The 1st Battalion had been hard hit, especially by mortar fire, and was as disorganized as the 3d. Colonel Cole commanded the positions on the right from his command post in the farmhouse and Colonel Cassidy stayed on the left; there was little consultation or communication between them.

On the right flank the defensive position was improved when a group of men, after routing a few remaining Germans from the ridge, pursued them down the side road which ran between the farmhouse and the ridge. These men set up a machine gun at the crossroads and, together with others who joined them later, engaged the Germans who had returned to take up positions in the houses south of the crossroads. For the rest of the day they remained there, virtually isolated, some 150 yards out ahead of the other American positions. Another small group set up two machine guns in the corner formed by two hedgerows behind the farmhouse; these guns could fire into the hedgerows to the east, into the orchard, and down the road to the crossroads. The defense, however, was not coordinated, and in the farmhouse Colonel Cole remained apprehensive. He did not know the situation on his flanks, his communications were out, and he thought that the supporting artillery was not effective. With their backs against the river, the troops had no rear area and hence no local reserve. The artillery observers could not see where their shells were landing because of the hedgerows and had to adjust fire, in the manner of jungle warfare, by sound. Very few of the men saw the enemy, who moved low behind the hedgerows; they judged his closeness by the sound of his fire.

In the middle of the morning enemy artillery and mortar fire increased in intensity, and the Germans began a counterattack. One of the strongest thrusts came through the orchard and

threatened to rout the Americans south and east of the farmhouse. But machine guns south of the house broke up the attack and the position was restored. It held throughout the morning.

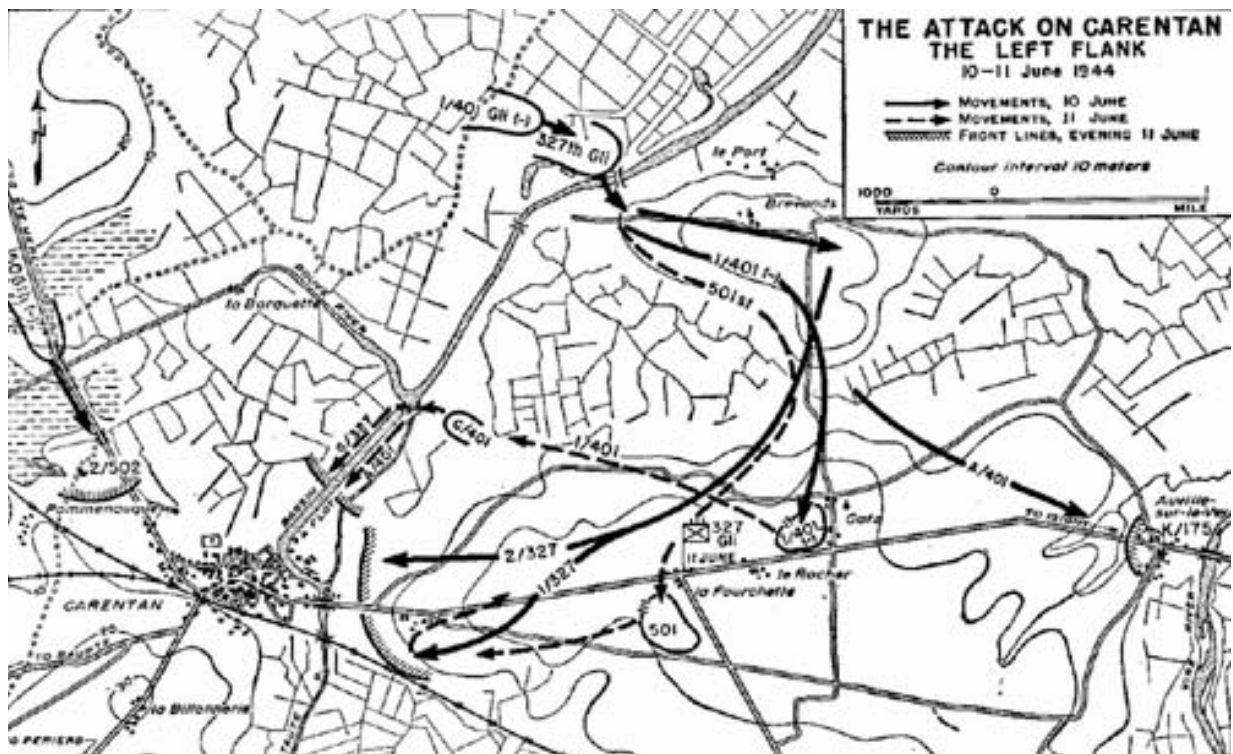
Shortly before noon an unexplained lull occurred in the fighting. The 502d Parachute Infantry took advantage of this to re-form its left flank positions. Company C moved forward from Bridge No. 4 to a cabbage patch between the second and third hedgerows where they could fire down along the forward hedgerow as well as along the highway. Company A took positions just behind Company C and extended its line across the road.

At noon Regiment notified the battalions that the enemy had requested a truce and ordered cease firing. It was a garbled message. The fact was that General McAuliffe, who was directing the operation for the 101st, was requesting this truce of the enemy. McAuliffe wanted time to clear the lines of his own casualties. Maj. Douglas T. Davidson, regimental surgeon, escorted by two Germans, went through the enemy lines to ask the military commander of Carentan for a breathing space to evacuate the wounded. When Major Davidson returned to Bridge No. 4, having been denied an interview with the German commander, the enemy opened fire- with rifles, machine guns, mortars, and artillery-in the most intense concentration of the day. Colonel Cole called Regiment and asked permission to return fire. He was ordered to wait, for Major Davidson had not yet returned to the regimental command post with definite word of the end of the truce. But the men in the line made their own decision and opened fire with all they had. They were convinced, not only by having observed the movements of the enemy during the truce, but also by the effectiveness of his renewed fire, that he had used the interlude to strengthen his small-arms positions and to prepare an artillery attack.

The renewed German attack strained the American positions almost to the breaking point. The group at the crossroads on the right flank had not received the cease fire order and had continued to fire on the Germans whom they had observed moving about to their left. When the truce ended and the enemy struck at the crossroads, some of the groups were forced to give ground. One of the machine guns behind the farmhouse, by interdicting the crossroads, helped the others to hold. The positions on the left, in the cabbage patch and along the hedgerows, managed to hold throughout the afternoon against repeated German attempts to come down the ditches beside the highway and along the hedgerows. At times they came so near that the men could hear the Germans working their bolts. The enemy gave the two battalions no respite and no opportunity to reorganize or evacuate the wounded. His artillery was weak, but his mortars never stopped firing.

Colonel Cole, looking out from a second-story window in the farmhouse, expected his line to crack. At 1830 he informed Regiment that he planned to withdraw and asked to have covering fire and smoke ready when the time came. He believed that only closer and heavier artillery support would enable him to hold out. But the radio of his artillery liaison officer, Capt. Julian Rosemond, had been jammed. When Captain Rosemond finally managed to get through to the artillery command post, the situation improved rapidly. During most of the day only two battalions had been firing in direct support. Now every gun in the command was brought to bear. To be effective it was necessary to adjust the fires very closely, with the result that two Americans were killed. The shells arched high over the American positions and fell in the field directly beyond the farmhouse. It lasted only five minutes, but when the fire lifted the sound of German firing was receding southward. Patrols sent out ascertained that the enemy had fled. At

about 2000 the 2d Battalion came up to take over the now improved positions, and the 1st and 3d Battalions withdrew. The enemy defense barring the way to Carentan from the north was broken, but the 502d Parachute Infantry was too exhausted to continue the attack. It requested relief, and the 506th Parachute Infantry was sent in to finish the job.<sup>1</sup>



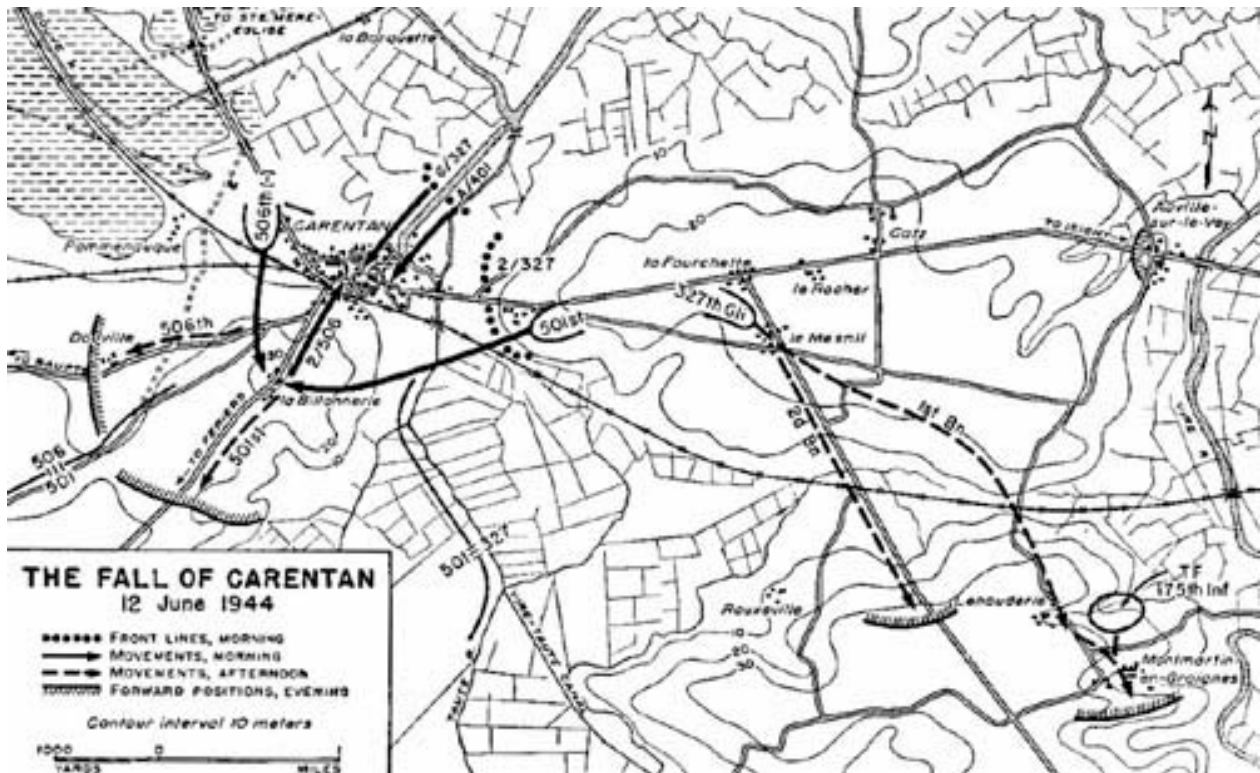
MAP NO. 17

### *The Left-Wing Attack on Carentan (10-11 June 1944)*

During the two days of the fight across the causeway the 101st Airborne Division's left wing had also been pressing southward. The first mission of the 327th Glider Infantry was to cross the lower Douve and secure the high ground around Brevands (Map No. 17). At 0145 on 10 June, Company C silently crossed the river and established a small bridgehead. The artillery and mortar barrage which prepared for the crossing of the rest of the regiment was so successful that all three battalions were across by 0600, and Brevands was occupied shortly thereafter. At noon Company A of the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was ordered to reconnoiter southeastward from Brevands toward Auville-sur-le-Vey on the west bank of the Vire River. About a mile and a half from its destination the company encountered a strong German force, and in a running battle it broke the enemy line and knocked out twelve machine guns. It then proceeded to Auville-sur-le-Vey, where it made contact with the 29th Reconnaissance Troop and

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Cole was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in the Carentan attack. Before he could receive the medal he was killed in action in Holland, 19 September 1944.

The 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, operated as a third battalion of the 327th Glider Infantry. In the airborne division reorganization effected in March 1944, the 401st Glider Infantry was split, one of its battalions being attached to the 327th Glider Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division and the other to the 325th Glider Infantry of the 82d Airborne Division. The former retained its own designation.



MAP NO. 18

Company K of the 175th Infantry (29th Division). The assistant G-3 of the 101st Airborne Division, who had accompanied Company A, went to the 29th Division headquarters to report the situation of the 101st, while Company A mopped up the enemy force which it had just broken up and which had constituted the last obstacle separating VII and V Corps. This done, it rejoined the 327th Glider Infantry for the advance on Carentan.

The approach to Carentan from the east is cut by the Vire-Taute Canal. The 327th Glider Infantry was ordered to block the eastern exits from the city by securing the railroad bridge and the Isigny highway bridge over the canal. Throughout the afternoon the regiment advanced rapidly, but it was stopped at 1800 some 500 yards from the canal by enemy fire from the houses and hedgerows on the east bank. The regiment reorganized to gain these 500 yards. The 2d Battalion moved north of the highway on the right, the 1st Battalion south of the highway; the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was in reserve. The attack drove the enemy across the canal and by midnight the two battalions had reached the last hedgerow and dug into positions behind it. They could now fire into the city and control the highway bridge, the only bridge still intact.

Both the railway bridge to the south and a footbridge to the north near the junction of the canal and the Douve had been blown. The footbridge, however, could be repaired to permit troops to cross. On the west bank, the wood bordering the Bassin à Flot provided a covered approach to Carentan. Col. Joseph H. Harper, who had assumed command of the 27th Glider Infantry that afternoon, decided to use this approach when he was ordered to continue the advance on Carentan. At dawn on 11 June a patrol repaired the footbridge, and at about 1000 two companies of the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, and Company G, 327th Glider Infantry, crossed under German mortar fire. Company G was to attack along the right side of the Bassin à Flot, Company A along the left, while Company C was to be in reserve. The 1st and 2d Battalions were to hold their positions to the south along the canal and support the attack by firing into the city.

The companies advanced several hundred yards through the woods toward Carentan, but when they were about half a mile from the city they were pinned down by machinegun and small-arms fire from the houses on the northeastern outskirts. American artillery was unsuccessful in checking the German fire, and the companies remained in the woods all day, unable to advance.

At about 2000 on 11 June, Colonel Harper was called back to the regimental command post. Here Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges (Deputy Commander, First Army), General Taylor, General McAuliffe, and Colonel Johnson (501st Parachute Infantry) had gathered to plan the next day's attack on Carentan. General McAuliffe was given the command of the task force which was to make a coordinated attack; it consisted of the 501st and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 327th Glider Infantry. The 501st was to move from its defensive position north of the Douve, cross the river near Brevands, where a treadway bridge had been built, and swing southwest to join Colonel Sink's men of the 506th near Hill 30, thus completing the division's ring around the city. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 327th Glider Infantry, were to continue to hold the canal. while the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, and Company G, 327th Glider Infantry, were to press their attack into Carentan from the northeast.

During the night of 11-12 June Carentan was set ablaze by artillery, naval guns, 4.2-inch mortars, and several tank destroyer guns which fired on point targets from the 327th Glider Infantry's positions along the canal.

The 1st and 2d Battalions, 506th Parachute Infantry, moved out at 0200 on 12 June. Near the farmhouse which had been Colonel Cole's command post they left the highway and moved cross country directly south to Hill 30 (Map No. 18). Neither battalion met serious resistance; the 1st drove in a German outpost line and occupied Hill 30, the 2d bivouacked on its right. Colonel Sink (506th Parachute Infantry) moved his command post group over the same route which the battalions had followed, but after leaving the highway he missed the way and swung to the south of Hill 30, where he dug in forward of the two battalions. At 0500, while still unaware of his own position, Colonel Sink ordered the 2d Battalion to attack toward Carentan. At dawn, when enemy fire made it apparent that the command post position was isolated and surrounded, the 1st Battalion was ordered to attack south from Hill 30 through the hamlet of la Billonerie toward the command post. As the 1st Battalion started out it was counterattacked near la Billonerie. It took heavy fighting through the hedgerows and houses to break through and extricate Colonel Sink's group.

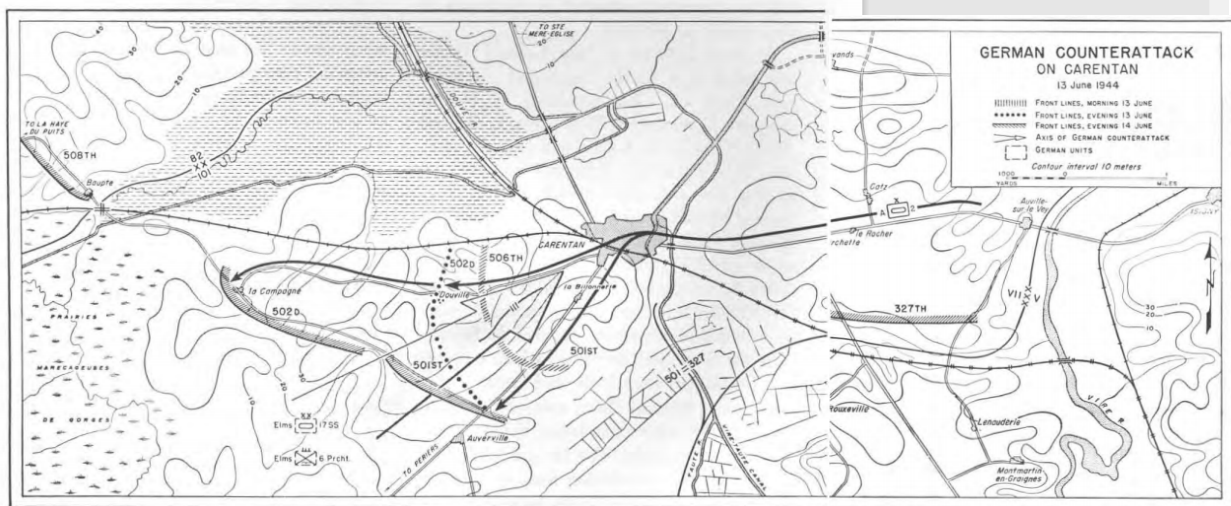
The 2d Battalion, meanwhile, had moved out astride the main road leading into Carentan from the southwest. It received harassing machine-gun fire and interdictory artillery fire from the south most of the way into town. As the battalion entered, it met the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, which had already come in from the northeast. This unit had pushed a patrol to the edge of the town before dawn, but it still faced the enemy rearguard and was temporarily stopped. At 0600 it attacked out of the wood at Bassin a Flot and drove rapidly into the center of Carentan. The meeting with the 2d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, occurred about 0730 after a short fight with enemy stragglers around the railroad station.

While the inner pincers thus squeezed shut in the town, the wide envelopment on the left intended to cut the enemy's southern escape routes was also closing. At dawn the 501st Parachute Infantry crossed the canal south of the 327th Glider Infantry, fought its way to Hill 30, and made contact with the 1st Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, about half an hour after the entry into Carentan. The double maneuver succeeded in capturing Carentan, but the trap closed too late to catch the bulk of the German defenders, who evidently had escaped south during the night.

### ***Securing Carentan (12-13 June 1944)***

With the capture of Carentan, VII Corps had acquired the vital link for its communication with V Corps. It now remained to solidify the junction of the beachheads and secure the approaches to the city by seizing additional ground to the southwest and east. This was included as part of the mission of the 101st Airborne Division, as outlined the day before, and the division set about this task immediately. The 501st and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments were to push out southwestward to the Prairies Marecageuses de Gorges, while the 1st and 2d Battalions, 327th Glider Infantry, were to secure the ground to the east and, on General Taylor's orders, to go beyond the railroad and seize the high ground south of Montmartin-en-Graignes, in order to insure the security of the intercorps boundary. The 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, remained in Carentan.

MAP NO. 19



MAP NO. 19

Reinforced by five tank destroyers, the two battalions of the 327th Glider Infantry set out along the Isigny highway early in the afternoon of 12 June (Map No. 18). At le Mesnil they turned south, the 2d Battalion advancing on the right, the 1st Battalion on the left. Shortly after crossing the railroad they ran into strong resistance, and at about 2100-2200 they were held up, the 2d Battalion in the vicinity of Rouxville, the 1st in the vicinity of Lenauderie. The 2d Battalion was unable to break through the German positions but the 1st penetrated the enemy defenses and contacted a force of about eighty men from the 29th Division, including Brig. Gen. Norman D. Cota, assistant division commander, which had been surrounded by the enemy. This force joined the 1st Battalion to continue the attack, which took Montmartin-en-Graignes and the high ground to the south.

Colonel Harper in his command post to the rear of his two battalions had lost contact with both and had only a vague idea of their situations. When he succeeded in reestablishing radio communication, he ordered the 1st Battalion to withdraw to the forest south of Lenauderie, abreast of the 2d Battalion on the right. He did not know that Montmartin-en-Graignes and the high ground had been taken. He called Division to ask for armor, but was informed that all the available armor was needed to check a counterattack against Carentan from the southwest.

On the night of 12-13 June General Cota reported that he had observed, from the high ground south of Montmartin-en-Graignes, some 150 German troops reentering the town. The message had been garbled to read "150 German tanks" and had induced General Bradley to send Colonel Harper armored support. When a major from General Bradley's headquarters walked into Colonel Harper's command post with the news that a company of medium tanks, a company of light tanks, and a battalion of armored infantry were on their way, Colonel Harper in surprise called Division to say that he would have enough strength with the armor to push on to St. Lo, if that was desired. But General Taylor called Corps and learned that because the Germans were threatening Carentan from the southwest he was to move the armor to Carentan. This armor was part of the force which arrived in Carentan in time to break the German attack. Colonel Harper called for artillery and naval barrage on Montmartin-en-Graignes.

On the morning of 13 June, the situation had been cleared sufficiently to enable Colonel Harper, on General Taylor's order, to withdraw his two battalions, under artillery cover, northward to the railroad. General Cota's group was ordered to rejoin the 29th Division. Colonel Harper, reinforced by the five tank destroyers, set up defenses which extended 3,000 yards along the north side of the tracks above Montmartin-en-Graignes. He remained here until 15 June. The German attack he had expected from Montmartin-en-Graignes did not develop

Meanwhile, the battle for the merging of the two beachheads was being decided near Carentan. On the afternoon of 12 June the 506th and the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiments had started to carry out their mission of securing the southwestern approaches to the town. The 506th on the right moved out westward along the Carentan-Baupte road, and the 501st on the left set out southwestward from Hill 30 along the Carentan-Periers highway. A small enemy force attacked the 2d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, at noon, but the battalion repulsed this counterattack and pursued the enemy into Douville, where it was stopped at a strongly organized position manned by parachutists and panzer troops. The ensuing fight lasted the rest of the day. During the night the 3d Battalion came in on the 2d's right. The 501st Parachute Infantry met similar

opposition on the Carentan-Periers highway and at the close of the day held a line only a short distance southwest of Hill 30.

An attack by the 506th Parachute Infantry was scheduled for the morning of 13 June, to deepen the defensive base around Carentan. Before the attack could get well under way a strong enemy counterattack, supported by armor, struck along both the Carentan-Baupte and Carentan-Periers roads (Map No. 19 ). Included in the German forces were elements of the 37th and 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiments and the 17th Tank Battalion, all from the 17th SS-Panzer Grenadier (Goetz von Berlichgen) Division, and also remnants of the 6th Parachute Regiment. The attack was obviously directed at the recapture of Carentan, and it drove to within 500 yards of the edge of the city. The 2d Battalion, 502d Parachute Infantry, moved down to the 506th Parachute Infantry's right flank and helped to regain some of the lost ground. But the attack threatened the junction of the V and VII Corps beachheads so seriously that First Army decided to send armor to repel it. Not until this armor arrived was the German threat eliminated and the link between the two corps firmly secured.

At 1030 elements of Combat Command A, 2d Armored Division, arrived in Carentan. One task force attacked west along the Carentan-Baupte road at 1400 and, followed by the 502d Parachute Infantry, passed through the 506th Parachute Infantry and drove westward. Another task force attacked along the Carentan-Periers highway. Both task forces received close support from the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. The coordinated efforts of the tanks, infantry, and artillery threw the enemy back several thousand yards, inflicting an estimated loss of 500 men. That night the 506th Parachute Infantry was relieved by the 502d on the right flank and passed to division reserve in Carentan.

On 14 June Carentan was secured and the junction with V Corps was completed. On the 101st Division's right flank, the 502d Parachute Infantry made contact with elements of the 82d Airborne Division at Baupte and, with the 501st Parachute Infantry on its left, it secured the road which runs southeast from Baupte to join the Carentan-Periers highway. The 327th Glider Infantry held the railroad from Carentan to the Vire River and had established contact with elements of the 29th Division on its left. Against this line enemy pressure dwindled. The 101st Airborne Division had thus completed its mission by extending the southern arc of the beachhead and welding together its isolated segments. On 15 June the 101st Division was transferred from VII Corps to VIII Corps, which gradually assumed responsibility for the protection of the VII Corps' southwest flank.