

tany and after, XIX TAC armed reconnaissance missions paid juicy dividends in locating and breaking up masses of enemy strength behind the battle line, in knocking out enemy tanks and vehicles approaching or fleeing the front, and in giving the Germans no leisure to rest, regroup, or maintain secrecy of movement.

Armored-column cooperation. Before the St. Lo breakthrough, between 10 and 14 tanks in every division were equipped with the same VHF radio sets carried by the fighters. Four and eight ship flights hovered over the lead elements of armored columns, ready to attack on request, to warn the tanks of hidden opposition, to eliminate delaying actions. These flights never returned to base until new flights came to relieve them. With this airplane cover always present, and as close by as fighters escorting heavy bombers, obstacles which might have taken hours to surmount were eliminated in a few minutes. Before St. Lo, a most important precaution was taken. All American vehicles had fresh white stars painted on them, and were given cerise and yellow panels to identify them to friendly aircraft. In a war which saw American and hostile tanks deep within each others lines, these measures saved many lives.

On 1 August XIX TAC had operational control of three groups of Thunderbolts. As General Patton's tanks plunged forward south of Avranches, the first air operations order assigned two groups to cover the progress of two armored divisions. The third group was ordered to fly armed reconnaissance deep into Brittany, over the broad fields where Third Army tanks would soon strike.

The P-47's could not take off until late afternoon, but they flew 10 separate missions in the few hours remaining before darkness. The first day's bag was miscellaneous. Spotting the muzzles of AA guns in some harmless-looking hay wagons, the Thunderbolt pilots blasted them to bits. Another flight knocked out three 88 millimeter field pieces in the path of the 6th Armored Division, and a third plastered a field bristling with enemy gun positions. The armed reconnaissance aircraft cut 3 railway lines, destroyed 22 motor vehicles and 2 armored cars, and raked a busy marshaling yard and a fuel dump. Statistically, it was an inauspicious beginning for the new air cooperation arm, but that was because the planes were grounded throughout most of the day.

In the next 4 days General Patton's armored columns penetrated and secured all Brittany except the heavily fortified ports. Intermittent bad weather kept many aircraft on the ground, but XIX TAC was growing to full strength and daily new missions which materially helped the Army's progress. Two more P-47 groups and one P-51 group joined General Weyland's forces before 5 August, and after only 3 days at its camp site XIX TAC headquarters again moved nearer the battle line, this time to Beauchamps, east of Granville.

General Patton's tactics developed explosively and intricately. General Weyland had to spread his flying strength thinly, cover new and vast areas every day, make maximum use of every fighter bomber. Broadly, the air-ground warfare in the first days of August broke into three phases.

First, three Third Army columns were cutting into Brittany along parallel lines. All required constant armored-column cover during good flying hours. The spearheads in southern and central

Brittany occasionally ran into dangerous tank concentrations or the cross fire of heavy guns, often met masses of enemy troops in bivouac areas or defensive deployments. The northernmost Third Army column, Brig. Gen. Herbert L. Ernest's armored task force, soon reached the concrete pillboxes ringing St. Malo and had to face fire both from powerful ground batteries and from warships in St. Malo Harbor.

Simultaneously, XV and later XX Corps fought southeastward from Fougères, in a move which started as protection for the rear of the Brittany-bound columns and which quickly matured into an independent drive. There were reports that these swiftly moving corps might be menaced by panzer units south of the Loire; therefore General Weyland's fighters and tactical reconnaissance planes had to maintain far-flung, vigilant patrols around the flanks.

Finally, on 3 August, the enemy inaugurated serious and potentially dangerous countermeasures. He struggled to concentrate his divided forces around Rennes and St. Malo, and, more ominously, he was massing strength at Mortain for an eleventh-hour drive to cut the narrow American supply corridor at Avranches.

This threat gave General Weyland the difficult job of protecting Third Army's rearward lines of communication against breaches by enemy ground forces and desperate attacks by small units of the Luftwaffe.

Armed column cover and armed resistance in Brittany General Patton's armored columns in Brittany were traveling so fast that frequently they outran their communications. For the Thunderbolts overhead, the bomb line was hourly

shifting westward, where the end of the peninsula juts into the Atlantic. The front was so unstable that attacks were never planned in advance; the P-47's eliminated any opposition as they found it.

Naturally the targets were scattered and miscellaneous. In the first 5 days of August, XIX TAC fighters bombed and strafed 21 German troop concentrations or bivouac areas and command headquarters, destroyed 250 motor vehicles, 12 tanks, 9 horse drawn vehicles, 4 locomotives, and 9 railway cars. The rail network in Brittany was not nearly so dense as that in Normandy, but Mustangs and Thunderbolts cut tracks in 5 places and disorganized 7 enemy fuel and supply dumps and 1 gasoline storage tank.

Although German defenses in Brittany were thin and widely separated, the aircraft of XIX TAC put 17 gun posts out of action, several at the direct request of ground forces temporarily thwarted by the enemy positions. One group of P-47's silenced eight guns one afternoon, and then flew on to destroy another which was marked off with white smoke by Third Army columns. Another afternoon, eight Thunderbolts precision-bombed and knocked out three self-propelled heavy guns directly on the line of advance into central Brittany.

German tanks in Brittany tried every ruse they could invent to escape the fighter-bombers, and occasionally they put in sudden appearances in the zone of operations. On the morning of 2 August, P-47's on armed reconnaissance along the northern coast of Brittany found a German armor assembly area and knocked out seven Tiger tanks which had been trying to conceal themselves under a smoke screen. Sometimes air cooperation requests from Third Army's G-3 for Air required immediate action and necessitated

