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him. He said he was confident that General Weyland's aircraft could discover any danger by armed and tactical reconnaissance, and could prevent any concentration or large movement by fighter bomber attacks. Then the Third Army drove eastward, seizing the principal cities on the north bank of the Loire and leaving only small garrisons behind to hold them.

XIX TAC shifted the main weight of its armed reconnaissance southward to the Loire. Roads, railway lines, and marshaling yards on the enemy side of the river were kept under constant surveillance. Judicious dive bombing and strafing attacks dissuaded the Germans from trying to cross the Loire in force. No real threat ever developed, and by 1 September XIX TAC could look back on a new, difficult job competently taken care of, the defense of the long, sensitive right side of General Patton's eastward bound columns.

Enemy air defeats. The first major flare-up of enemy air power against the Third Army and XIX TAC began on 7 August and continued sporadically for 4 days. The Luftwaffe was defeated in nearly every large and small engagement. On the fifth day no enemy aircraft appeared. On the 7th, German aircraft suddenly became aggressive, made a last-ditch attempt to check the encirclement of Von Kluge's armies south of the Seine. Early in the morning German bombers carried out a damaging attack on an American supply column southwest of Mortain. At break of day XIX TAC aircraft took off as usual, knowing they might meet the Luftwaffe. Before dusk, 33 German planes were destroyed, 14 in the air and 19 on the ground.

First blood was drawn when the XIX TAC operations room vectored 12 Thunderbolts, which were covering an armored column, to attack the rich Luftwaffe airfield at Chartres. Veering toward the field, the fighter-bombers dropped 8 economical bombs, destroying 6 German aircraft and damaging 3 others. Then Mustangs of the pioneer 354th Group shot up 12 Me-109's and 1 Ju-88 parked on a well-camouflaged GAF airdrome 6 miles to the east. Finally, other Mustangs sweeping the Mayenne area were directed to a new course to intercept 12 aggressive Me-109's. They destroyed 5 and damaged 2.

The next day, as General Patton's leading elements began to burst open the wasp's nest of airdromes between the Loire and the Seine, the Germans flew in groups of 20 to 40 aircraft, and attacked only when they had local superiority in numbers and could count on the advantage of surprise. They tried desperately to break up the widespread rail and road wrecking tactics of the American airmen, but by the end of the day five enemy aircraft were down and armed reconnaissance was progressing more punishingly than ever. German single-engine fighters based on the superb flying fields around Paris were now forced to fight defensively to protect their bases, and the Luftwaffe had to make extraordinary efforts to put an offensive patrol into the air.

On 9 August Thunderbolts covering the XV Corps were frequently vectored off course to meet enemy fighters. "Vectored to hostile aircraft by 78th Division," reported 12 pilots of the 362nd Fighter Group. "Two Me-109's observed 1000 hours at 700 feet. One destroyed; one evaded combat. Losses: None."

Far to the east of the battle line, beyond Paris, P-51's of the 354th Group saw long rows of Ju-88's on the Reims-Champagne airfield, and flew down the muzzles of German antiaircraft guns to machine-gun the base from 6,000 feet to the "deck." They destroyed 6 German aircraft, 2 light flak guns, and a flak tower. Nearer the fighting front, scores of American planes engaged large numbers of German aircraft in combat. Results for the day: 13 enemy planes

destroyed in the air, 6 on the ground.

German activity died down on 10 August, when only four enemy planes were shot down. On 11 August none appeared. Costly to the foe though they had been, those 4 days had been only a prelude to the defeat of the Luftwaffe in France.

Armed reconnaissance, 6-12 August. The statistical story of armed reconnaissance for this period is as follows: More than 75 locomotives, almost 1,000 freight cars, almost 1,000 motor transport vehicles, more than 125 horse-drawn vehicles, seven bridges, eight marshaling yards, eight supply, fuel, and ammunition dumps, destroyed by XIX TAC Thunderbolts and Mustangs on armed reconnaissance in 6 violent days.

From the beginning of this phase XIX TAC sent its armed reconnaissance planes far beyond Paris, far south of the Loire. The campaign had a focal point; in wide railroad reconnaissance sweeps north, east, and south of Paris the fighter-bombers sought to isolate the eastern battlefield, to strangle the rail lines entering Paris from every direction. Around Paris P-47's and P-51's spotted, bombed, strafed, and destroyed long, loaded troop trains, standing rows of loaded oil tankers, fuel dumps, and all types of transport.

One morning the 362nd Group sent out a 40 plane armed reconnaissance sweep north and east of Paris. This patrol, one of hundreds in those 6 days, returned to its landing strip after a few hours of field-day flying with this report: four 500 pound bombs dropped on enemy guns, 8 guns silenced, two 500 pound bombs dropped on marshaling yards, 40 boxcars and 1 locomotive destroyed; 8 railway cars damaged at another marshaling yard, 25 damaged at a third; 2 fragmentation clusters on a hostile airdrome; 7 miscellaneous motor transport vehicles raked and destroyed on the roads, 15 freight cars loaded with 155 millimeter German guns strafed and damaged.

That same afternoon, on its third mission of the day, this same group planted 26 bombs on 7 Tiger tanks, 16 on a marshaling yard, and, in a deck-strafing sweep, machine-gunned 2 armored cars, 2 ammunition trucks, and 1 gasoline truck.

With one group wreaking such destruction in one day it was small wonder that as the infantry and tanks advanced, they found the roads cluttered with the twisted wreckage of German trucks, half-tracks, tanks, and guns.

Closing the jaws. As the trap began to form, tank hunting was good. Squadrons covering the advance of the XV Corps' armored divisions between Laval and Mayenne found plenty of enemy armor. P-47's and P-51's entered tank battles around Mortain and Vire. When the Germans swung about at Alencon to meet the Third Army's threat to their rear, American fighter-bombers and artillery found the roads and the fields full of targets to attack.

XIX TAC's statistical record for 6-12 August: More than 150 tanks and armored cars destroyed. More than 30 field guns or mobile flak posts wiped out. Three troop concentrations scattered. One German headquarters strafed and dispersed.

Communications along the standard channel, tactical reconnaissance to ground to TAC headquarters to aircraft in the air, improved immensely, as did the simpler thick of battle communication between fighters and tanks beneath them. With swifter communications, fighter-bombers began to figure more and more prominently in tank battles and armored thrusts as they were going on. The tanks that entered Morlaix had an extremely helpful flight of Mustangs circling constantly overhead. The 78th Infantry Division asked for an air attack on a camouflaged house and tower; the doughboys watched five hits with 500 pounders tear the German