

position apart. Enemy tanks stopped the Third Army momentarily northeast of Alencon. Fifteen general-purpose bombs—and the Third Army resumed its offensive.

When fighter-bombers were not right there, the ground forces knew that they could be summoned and would arrive within the hour. The Fifth Infantry Division requested bombardment of some railway gun positions which were holding up their progress near Angers. Forty minutes later, Fighter Control and Combat operations vectored a Thunderbolt squadron to the area and the enemy guns were shattered by two direct hits.

Reports of spur-of-the-moment tasks performed for the ground forces began to flood XIX TAC headquarters. From 8 Thunderbolts: "Targets assigned by Egg cup. Two direct hits with 500 pound bombs on small buildings. Completely destroyed." From 7 Mustangs: "Vectored by Grand chap Able to road. Destroyed 50 motor transport, damaged 80. Destroyed 25 horse-drawn vehicles. Killed 200 troops."

Along the boundary between the First and the Third Armies' zones of operations, aircraft of XIX TAC frequently were radioed emergency requests. One report read: "Fourteen bombs on mortar position. Target assigned by Murphy. Position destroyed." Murphy was the code name of a First Army combat command.

Perhaps the surest indication of the effectiveness the fighter bomber attacks was the unprecedented surrender of German troops to air power. One day 8 Mustangs flashed a report that they had "strafed a column of more than 100 motor transport and animal-drawn vehicles and continued until the Germans put up a white flag and our troops closed in to take them from the southwest and east."

Brest, Lorient, St. Malo, and the Ile de Cezembre. Fighter-bombers were obviously not the planes with which to storm citadels. When General Patton's divisions were stumped around the forts of Brest, Lorient, and St. Malo, and the nearby Ile de Cezembre, requests for air cooperation were transmitted to the heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force and the mediums of the Ninth. Yet Thunderbolts and Mustangs did all they could. On 10 August 8 courageous P-47 pilots asked the Fourth Armored Division for permission to dive-bomb the marshaling yards at Lorient, the concrete walled submarine base below Brest. Told to go ahead, they flew down into intense, accurate, heavy and light flak to destroy 42 railway cars and a flak battery. Every Thunderbolt returned. Meanwhile, over Brest and St. Malo, two Mustang teams on tactical reconnaissance observed all kinds of movement and sent back radio reports to XIX TAC headquarters. These flights meant that far less time was wasted in uneventful armed reconnaissance. When the tactical reconnaissance planes found important targets, armed and bombed-up Thunderbolts and Mustangs were sent to them immediately.

Third Phase The Falaise-Argentan trap eventually netted 57,000 Germans. According to an unofficial report in mid August, "There were 2 dead Germans for every live one, and the greatest stench of all time hung over the pocket." The crucial week of 12-19 August saw the Seventh Army all but liquidated, the Fifteenth Army turned back violently when it came to help, and individual soldiers rushing pell-mell across the Seine and back to Germany without organization, chain of command, weapons, or transport.

As the week started, General Patton's XV Corps was driving northward from Alencon and the Canadian First Army southward from Falaise. The Germans in the pocket had plenty of fight left. Behind them stretched an escape channel several miles wide, and on 13 August they made their first large-scale attempt to withdraw.

That morning 37 P-47 pilots of the 36th Group found 800 to 1,000 enemy vehicles of all types milling about in the pocket west of Argentan. They could see American and British forces racing to choke off the gap. They went to work. Within an hour the Thunderbolts had blown up or burned out between 400 and 500 enemy vehicles. The fighter-bombers kept at it until they ran out of bombs and ammunition. One pilot, with empty gun chambers and bomb shackles, dropped his belly tank on 12 trucks and left them all in flames. All told, on the 13th, XIX TAC fighter-bombers destroyed or damaged more than 1,000 road and rail vehicles, 45 tanks and armored vehicles, and 12 locomotives. Inside the pocket they reduced 10 enemy delaying-action strong points to rubble.

The pocket was shrinking. The Germans inside used all their food and gasoline, and the trains and trucks coming to re supply them were stopped miles away from their destination. An 18 year old prisoner fainted while being interrogated; he and his company had no food for 4 days after fighter-bombers had smashed their field kitchen. Another prisoner, a junior officer of the 363rd Infantry Division, said: "You have bombed and strafed all the roads, causing complete congestion and heavy traffic jams. You have also destroyed most of our gasoline and oil dumps, so there is no future in continuing the fight."

With the entire German force in the trap beginning to think the same way, P-47's carried leaflet bombs besides their more lethal loads. On 14 August, 300 to 400 enemy soldiers waved a white flag when Thunderbolts of the 405th Group circled them northeast of Argentan. Fighter control was given the grid coordinates so that the nearest ground troops could pick up the prisoners.

Four days after the dismal rout of the 13th, the Germans tried another mass movement out of the pocket. Figuring that low clouds offered a reasonably good safeguard against our aircraft, they began to take to the roads two and three abreast in anything that had wheels.

A short squadron of American fighter-bombers dived dangerously low through the clouds and saw the traffic jam already under attack. They sent word back to headquarters, and soon the sky was so full of British and American fighter-bombers that they had to form up in queues to make their bomb runs. The gigantic attack kept up until after nightfall. At dawn the next day the Thunderbolts of the 36th Group spotted more than 1,000 enemy vehicles headed north, bumper to bumper. Nearer Falaise, they saw 1,000 more vehicles marked off by yellow smoke. Eagerly the pilots radioed back to base, but were told not to attack because the vehicles were in the British area of responsibility. The aircraft of XIX TAC disconsolately stuck to their own operational zone, while Typhoons, Spitfires, and Mustangs of the RAF's Second Tactical Air Force annihilated or damaged almost 3,000 German vehicles.

That day a senior staff officer of the British Second Army said that the Germans' power of resistance had been shattered.

As the aircraft of XIX TAC, IX TAC, and 2nd TAF were cornering, immobilizing, and destroying the Germans in the pocket, General Patton's tanks reached the banks of the Seine at Mantes Gassicourt and Vernon. The XV Corps immediately swung east along the river bank, closing a huge new trap around the enemy remnants which had escaped from Falaise. The enemy now fought to get to the Seine and across by ferry, barge, Pontoon bridge, and even by swimming, while XIX and IX TAC's sent implacable patrols over the river to catch the Germans in flight.

Fourth Phase The Luftwaffe goes home. Outnumbered, outfought, outmaneuvered, the Luftwaffe did what it could to frus-