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XX

CORPS

HISTORY

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HISTORY - XA CORPS

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ASST. H. CG, XX CORPS.

INITIALS: *[Signature]*

DATE: *30 July 44*

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HISTORY

XX CORPS

THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY

Commanded by: Major General WALTON H. WALKER

Chief of Staff: Col. Wm. A. Collier

- G-1 Col. Chas. G. Meehan
- G-2 Col. Henry M. Zeller
- G-3 Col. W. B. Griffith
- G-4 Col. Wm. B. Leitch

Four Copies:

- Copy #1 - CG XX Corps
- Copy #2 - TSCO XX Corps
- Copy #3 - Theater Historian ETOUSA
- Copy #4 - H-2 Historical Branch, War Dept.

Historians:

2/Lt. H. A. Morris
T/4 F. M. Ludden

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PRELIMINARY PLANNING
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The nine weeks prior to the actual physical movement across channel from England to the Normandy coast of France were devoted by the sections at XX Corps Headquarters to the preparation of detailed operational plans. For nine weeks every possibility and contingency, no matter how remote, complete to the most minute detail, under general missions assigned to XX Corps were probed, analyzed and exhausted. Nine weeks of unremitting effort, of research, and of checking and rechecking every point and every fact.

It began on the 8th day of May, 1944 when Major General Walker with his Chief of Staff, Colonel Wm. A. Collier, accompanied by; G-3, Col. W.B. Griffith; the G-2, Col. Zeller; the G-4, Col. Engerud; the Engineer Officer of XX Corps, Col. Tandy; and the assistant G-3, Lt. Col. Stark, went to Peover Hall at Knutsford England. There they met with Lt. General Patton, his Chief of Staff, Major General Hugh Gaffey and his deputy Chief of Staff, Brig. General Gay and the staff section chiefs of Third U.S. Army. Major General Cook of XII Corps with corresponding members of his staff was also present. At this meeting the approximate date of the invasion of the European continent was divulged and the general plan of execution was discussed. General Walker was orally briefed on the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEP) plan termed NEPTUNE for the combined American-English invasion of Normandy, France. At this time the employment possibilities of XX Corps were neither firm nor established. One week after their return, on the 15th of May 1944, the written plan in outline form called NEPTUNE which had previously been orally discussed was received at XX Corps Headquarters. On this date General Walker was

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ordered by 3rd USArmy directive to prepare and submit XX Corps plan under the pertinent portions of the general outline plan.

Under the general outline plan, NEPTUNE XX Corps was to be prepared to move to France on or about D+45 or 23 July 1944. The then forecast of the progress of the Allied advance was that either by D+40 the reduction of the Brittany Peninsula by XV Corps, or by XV Corps in conjunction with VIII Corps would be well under way, or, in the event this was not true then VIII Corps and XV Corps would be contained and unable to reduce the Brittany Peninsula. However, if the Brittany Peninsula was reduced by D+40 it was planned that the balance of the 3rd USArmy would land through the ports and beaches of the Brittany and Cotentin Peninsulas and would assemble for operations to the East. Again, if the advance was contained and the facilities of the existing beachheads were limited, it would then be necessary to establish another beach-head by amphibious and airborne assault in the vicinity of Meriaix as a base from which to strike out and capture Brest and reduce the Brittany Peninsula.

Given this estimate of the situation XX Corps staff prepared three plans to meet the contingencies outlined. Plan A detailed instructions and priorities for an overseas movement and debarkation on secured beaches or ports of the Cotentin Peninsula. Plan B, based on the same instructions and priorities called for a landing on the beaches in the Quiberon Bay area. It was assumed that these beaches would not be developed at the time of XX Corps landings. For this reason, a detailed terrain study of the beach approaches, capacities, and outlets was made, and it was further assumed

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that the support of an Engineer Shore Brigade or additional Engineer troops would be available to support the operation.

Plan C (Operation SWORDHILT) called for a seaborne operation to be carried out concurrently with an airborne attack in the vicinity of the city of Morlaix on the Brittany coast of Northern France. There to seize a beach-head, concentrate, then to sweep forward in a southwesterly direction towards the larger city and important harbor of Brest. This operation was to go into effect when VIII Corps and XV Corps had succeeded in pushing forward approximately 1/3 of the way up the bulky Brittany Peninsula. These three completed plans involving XX Corps were submitted to and as a part of Third U S Army general outline plan on 1 June 1944. Immediately thereafter and as directed by the Commanding General of Third U S Army Plan C was expanded into the detailed plan known as Operation SWORDHILT.

To accomplish Operation SWORDHILT XX Corps was to be a highly mobile, self-sufficient independent Corps consisting of two Infantry Divisions (5th and 28th), an Armored Division (6th) and an Airborne Division (82nd) with attached or assigned units totalling in all, 99,900 officers and enlisted men with 20,218 vehicles. The component parts of this large Corps force were set up as follows:

	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>Vehicles</u>
2 Infantry Div. (5th and 28th)	28246	4395
1 Armored Div. (6th)	11046	2744
1 Airborne Div. (82nd)	8573	682
Engineers	15169	2981
Artillery	9167	2309
AA Arty (self propelled and mobile)	5392	1440
Quartermaster troops	5112	1211
Tank Destroyer	4469	1235
Armored Units (Composite Tank Bns)	3020	848
Ordnance	2278	539
Medical	2258	329
Signal	1750	501

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	ersonnel	vehicles
Military Police	836	161
Cavalry	774	240
Chemical	622	308
Special Units	379	141
XX Corps Hq. and Hq. Co.	629	224
TOTAL	99,900	20218

The Artillery listed above was in addition to the Division Artillery of each Division and consisted of:

- 3 Battalions Armored FA-----105mm How. (SP)
- 2 Battalions FA-----105mm How. (trk)
- 2 Battalions FA-----155mm Gun (SP)
- 5 Battalions FA-----155mm How. (Trac)
- 2 Battalions FA-----8" How (Trac)
- 1 Battalion FA-----4.5" Gun (Trac)
- 5 Hq. Batteries
- 1 Observation Battalion

The hazardous coast, the poor road facilities and the extremely rugged terrain account for the large number of Engineer Corp personnel. It was deemed necessary to have an Engineer Special Brigade to maintain any beach-head secured plus Bridge and Ponton Companies to develop and build up the road net in the target area. To illustrate the reasoning involved, a special Engineering survey report read, in part, as follows: "Coast line beset with offlying dangers from rocks***beaches concerned could only be worked in fine weather***practically all the roads are 3rd and 4th class needing development and construction to handle the tonnage assessed. Coast considered very bad, the anchorages are mostly exposed, there are many offlying dangers***local pilots***necessary". Of the thirteen beaches in the target area generally only nine could possibly be used and five of these only after considerable development work by the Engineers. (See MAP NUMBER ONE attached hereto for Engineers study of the target area).

To render the Operation Swordhilt, so painstakingly prepared, operational it was necessary to co-ordinate with the

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Air Support, the Navy, and Services of Supply. However, XX Corps was not authorized to co-ordinate with these vital services and branches due to their pre-occupation elsewhere, namely, the invasion. Nevertheless as submission of the detailed plan had been directed, the various section chiefs went ahead and made basic assumptions predicated on the units and types of support furnished First U S Army for its assault on the Normandy Coast. This was secured by study of the First U S Army plan. These basic assumptions if met by the interested branches of the service would then make the plan operational. This reasoning from logical premises continued until the plan was completed in detail on 22 June 1944. Thereafter each section chief prepared pertinent questions exhaustively searching and examining the requirements and necessities of his particular section. These questions dealt specifically with the Operation SWORDHILT and were based on the original assumptions. A deadline which was met of 28 June 1944 was established by the Chief of Staff, Colonel Collier for the completion and submission of these specific enquiries.

While these interrogatories were being prepared Headquarters XX Corps received word to direct the 28th Division, then attached to it, to designate one of its amphibiously trained Regimental Combat Teams to commence and complete a detailed plan for a particular amphibious operation. Because of the experience and skill of its Commanding Officer, a Colonel W.L. Bianton, and the extensive training it had received in amphibious operations the 109th Regimental Combat Team of the 28th Division was selected. Colonel Bianton was directed to plan a seaborne assault on Belle Isle, off the western coast of France, by an amphibious Regimental Combat Team reinforced

by Tanks and Artillery and supported by the Air and the Navy. The assault was to be preceded by an airborne assault of two Parachute Regiments and a battalion of Parachute Field Artillery. This operation was to be an integral part of the larger operation called CHASTITY which had for its goal the military reduction and development of the entire Quiberon Bay area. Belle Isle commanded the Quiberon Bay area from the ocean and its reduction would be necessary. Major Overten of the G-3 Staff of XX Corps was attached as a staff officer to the 109th Regimental Combat Team to assist Colonel Bianton.

On 29 June 1944 XX Corps received a directive from Third U S Army to have its G-2 and G-3 representatives accompanied by similar representatives from the 28th Division meet at the Headquarters of First United States Army Group (FUSAG). This meeting was also attended by representatives from SHAEF, the Allied Naval Expeditionary Force, the Air Force, SOS, FUSAG, Third U S Army (TUSA) and members of the British Airborne Command. At this time the operational plans BENEFICIARY and HANDS UP were outlined by FUSAG. This meeting was adjourned until the following Monday when final questions prior to detailed planning were to be submitted and discussed. At the meeting on the following Monday the date for the submission of the detailed plans of the operations was set as 8 July 1944 for Beneficiary and 15 July 1944 for HANDS UP.

Work commenced at once on BENEFICIARY. The Operation BENEFICIARY presupposed that the Allied advance would be contained on the Avranches-Argentan line by approximately 10 enemy divisions and that the ports and beaches of the Carentan Peninsula would not be sufficient to supply a further build-up

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of troops. A landing at the base of the Brittany Peninsula would provide another Port of entry, be a diversion from the Avranches line and provide a force for the drive west to the port of Brest or east to provide junction with forces on the NEPTUNE beach-head in Normandy. The point selected for landing was the St. Malo area. The city of St. Malo has limited port facilities. The prominent feature of the area is the Rance Estuary, separating two peninsulas. The Estuary is $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 miles wide, St. Malo on the East and the town of Dinard on the West. In the area the coast is rugged, with head lands rising 100 to 200 feet to a table land of gently rolling country with thin, sandy soil supporting crops of cereals and orchards and cut into small fields with hedges and windbreaks which restrict movement to roads and make observation nonexistent. There are a number of small streams which cut deeply the incised valleys that presumably would have to be bridged. The Engineers reconnoitered thirty beaches on the two peninsulas, but only three of these were considered good beaches for assault landings. The terrain definitely favored the defender.

G-2 estimated that there were four or five Battalions of Russians manning the coastal defenses and that the 5th Parachute Division could be brought up immediately to repel the assault. This force might be reinforced by elements of the enemy 319 Infantry Division drawn from the Channel Islands. By D/1 a reserve division from the Avranches line could be brought up, and by D/2 it was possible that two Regimental Combat Teams from the German 266th and the 275th Infantry Divisions could be brought in from their stations in the Southeast of Brittany. One could assume that approximately three divisions would be opposing the beach-head assault by D/3.

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To make a successful landing on this terrain and against this defensive force FUSAG directed a combined Airborne and Seaborne assault by two Infantry Divisions plus airborne troops under XX Corps direction. XX Corps estimated that additional Engineer troops would be required and under the assumption that these troops would be made available, the planning went forward in detail. (See MAP NUMBER TWO attached hereto)

The plan provided for an initial airborne landing on H-(12to48) of the 1st British Airborne Division East of St. Male to seize and clear beaches 379 and 381 and initiate the assault of St. Male. The 504th Parachute Regimental Combat Team and the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade Group were to land west of the Rance Estuary on the Dinard Peninsula, seize and clear beach 399 and initiate the assault on the town of Dinard. The 887th Airborne Aviation Engineer Battalion was to prepare a landing strip on the Dinard Peninsula.

The initial seaborne assault was to be made by elements of the 28th Infantry Division and an Engineer Special Brigade. To the east the 110th Regimental Combat Team to be attached on landing to the 1st Airborne Division was to land over beaches 379 and 381, establish contact with and become a part of the 1st Airborne Division then to carry on the assault of St. Male and establish the initial beach-head line. To the west of the Estuary the 109th Regimental Combat Team of the 20th Infantry Division was to land over beach 399, establish contact with the 504th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. The 20th Infantry Division with the 504th Parachute RCT and the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade Group attached to it was to assist in the reduction of Dinard and to establish the

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initial beach-head line. The reserve, the 112th RCT of the 28th Infantry Division, minus the 1st Battalion was to follow up over beach 999 after the 109th RCT while the 1st Battalion was to land if necessary on the Ile de Cezembre to neutralize hostile Artillery present if such defenses had not been previously neutralized by the Navy and the Air support.. The 80th Infantry Division was to follow, one RCT over beaches in the Dinard Peninsula and two RCTs over beaches in the St. Malo Peninsula area. The total force of the beach-head assault was to be 91,575 men and 17,661 vehicles.

It was estimated that the port and beach facilities would not be able to supply a larger force than this until, or if, the beach-head facilities were developed or contact was made with the NEPTUNE forces on the Avranches line. Thus the remaining elements of XX Corps troops were not to be phased into the initial planning. When the beach-head was established and the forces consolidated it would then be possible to make a thrust toward Rennes, link up with the NEPTUNE forces, or initiate a drive west with the objective of capturing Brest.

On the morning of 8 July 1944 the completed planning for Operation BENEFICIARY, in mimeographed form, was in the hands of FUSAG.

The full planning capabilities of XX Corps was then turned on the operation known as HANDS UP. This operation called for a combined sea and air assault to establish a lodgment area in the vicinity of Vannes. This to be done prior to the setting in of Winter and to exploit the harbor and port facilities of the entire Quiberon Bay area. Tentative schemes of maneuver and troop lists were submitted and discussed with FUSAG and the Navy. On 12 July 1944 after a conference with the Twenty-First Army Group

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FUSAG ordered further planning by XX Corps and the Operation Hands UP be suspended. On the same day, 12 June 1944 XX Corps recieved official notice that it was alerted for overseas movement in conformity with Plan A of the general Plan NEPTUNE. On 15 July 1944, nine weeks after the detailed operational planning began, XX Corps forward Echelon moved out of its location at Ogbourne St. George.

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