

1st Inf Div  
Normandy, France



The Germans had the same idea: to block off the town of Avranches and its two strategic bridges, plus an important bridge over the Sélune river near Pontaubault, four miles away; everybody had to take it; from Pontaubault the single French highway splints into three directions.

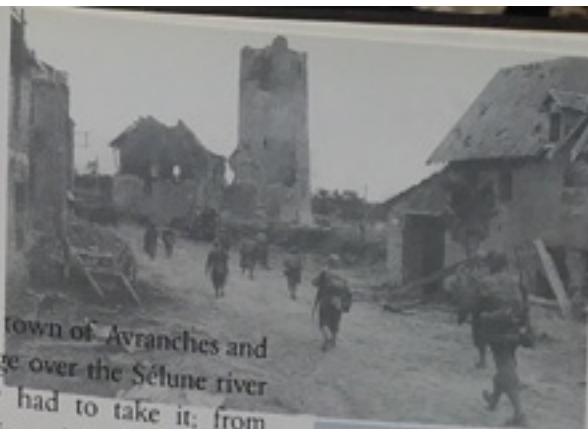
The very first of several hundred Germans began reaching the bridge around midnight of July 30. They included a column of racing ambulances and trucks. The first few ambulances began to cross the darkened river when an explosion lighted up the night. Avranches was not actually so deserted, for just a few hours before they began to cross, a tiny band of U.S. tanks had arrived first. Shooting erupted. But the fight was over quickly, when several hundred Germans



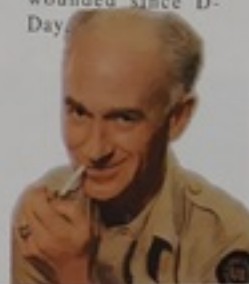
marched out across the bridge with white flags and arms straight up. No American was killed. The Germans had given up surprisingly quickly. This was a sign of things to come. Discovered in some of their ambulances were caches of ammo. It was also learned from the POW's that another armed column was approaching. Was this a trick? What do you do with prisoners at midnight? Before any clear cut answer was decided, they arrived, —a much larger armed unit. The U.S. troops were outnumbered, and the several hundred POW's, plus the bridge, were abandoned. All during the early morning more Germans packed into Avranches, many were really frightened souls, who wanted to just keep going; others set up some kind of stand complete with artillery. However, none of Hitler's fabled generals were in this mess. They had vamoosed elsewhere.

A turn of events befell the German troops when daylight broke. They were pelted by Thunderbolts and U.S. artillery, which had caught up. The Germans could not break out, and in the end they surrendered. Several hundred became POW's the hard way.

On July 31, the 4th reached the little town of Sélune and took the vital bridge in Pontaubault, as well as several dams east of the bridge. Something like fifty miles had been covered in three to four days! In the last two days of July, frontline GI's of the 4th and 6th Armored and 8th and 79th Inf Divisions had captured the largest number of POW's accounted in the history of the Allied armies on a comparable time to date, over 8,300 prisoners. But that was only a small part of some chilling news for Hitler. As a matter of fact, of the 28,000 Germans taken in July, some 20,000 were taken the last days of the month. A withdrawal from



Saint Fromond's old dusty roads being travelled by a M-10 tank. About 28,000 German POW's were taken in July in Normandy, part of over 100,000 Germans killed or wounded since D-Day.



The real Ernie Pyle in color.



2nd Inf Div  
Normandy, St. Lo, Brittany,  
Brest