

BREAKOUT AND PURSUIT

That little stood in the way of continued advance was clearly evident. The 4th and 6th Armored Divisions together had taken more than 4,000 prisoners on 31 July. The 79th and 8th Divisions, moving behind the armor on secondary roads, had done little more than process about 3,000 additional prisoners, all willing to be out of the war. In contrast with these figures, casualties of the VIII Corps from 28 through 31 July totaled less than 700.

Fighter-bomber pilots continued to wreak havoc on the retreating enemy columns. Destroyed enemy vehicles along the roads continued to constitute the chief obstruction to ground operations. One pilot counted seventy vehicles burning during the night of 30 July in the Vire-Laval-Rennes-Avranches region. Everywhere in the Cotentin German disorganization was rampant. Abandoned equipment and sup-

plies—guns, tanks, and trucks—littered the countryside as German units fled south and east, and west into Brittany. So great was the destruction in the VIII Corps zone that “hundreds of dead horses, cows, and pigs [and the] stench and decay pervading” were judged “likely menaces to water points and possible bivouac areas.”⁴⁹

The facts were obvious. The German defenses in the Cotentin had crumbled and disintegrated. The Americans on the last day of July 1944 possessed and controlled the last natural defensive line before Brittany. From the German point of view, the situation had become a “*Riesensauerei*”—one hell of a mess.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ VIII Corps Engineer Recon Rpt, 31 Jul, VIII Corps G-3 Jnl and File; FUSA Msgs, 31 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl File and 4th Armd Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁵⁰ Telecon, Kluge and Blumentritt, 1023, 31 Jul, OB WEST KTB, *Anlage* 966.

CHAPTER XVII

The “Incalculable” Results

The Riesensauerei

“It’s a madhouse here,” Kluge cried in despair as he attempted to describe the situation on the morning of 31 July.

At the *Seventh Army* command post in le Mans, Kluge for the second day was for all intents and purposes commanding the *LXXXIV Corps* and the *Seventh Army*, in addition to performing his official duties as commander of *Army Group B* and *OB WEST*.

“You can’t imagine what it’s like,” he told General der Infanterie Guenther Blumentritt, the *OB WEST* chief of staff, on the telephone. “Commanders are completely out of contact [with their troops]. Jodl and Warlimont [Hitler’s chief advisers at OKW] ought to come down and see what is taking place.”

Who was to blame? The whole mess had started, it seemed to Kluge, “with Hausser’s fatal decision to break out to the southeast. So far, it appears that only the spearheads of various [American] mobile units are through to Avranches. But it is perfectly clear that everything else will follow. Unless I can get infantry and antitank weapons there, the [left] wing can not hold.”

Apropos of that, Blumentritt said, OKW wanted to know the locations of all the alternate and rearward defenses under construction in Normandy.

Kluge did not hide his derision. “All

you can do is laugh out loud,” he replied. “Don’t they read our dispatches? Haven’t they been oriented? They must be living on the moon.”

“Of course,” Blumentritt agreed smoothly.

Kluge’s mood changed. “Someone has to tell the Fuehrer,” he said, without designating who was to perform the unpleasant task, “that if the Americans get through at Avranches they will be out of the woods and they’ll be able to do what they want.”

The terrible thing, Kluge said, was that there was not much that anyone could do. “It’s a crazy situation.”¹

At 0030 on 31 July, Kluge had authorized the *Seventh Army* to withdraw to a line from Granville to Troisgots.² Thirty minutes later he was trying to get the *LXXXIV Corps* back still farther, to the Avranches–Villedieu-les-Poëles line, but without much success—for his messages were not getting through. At this time Kluge admitted unequivocably that his left flank had collapsed.³

¹ Telecon, Kluge and Blumentritt, 1023, 31 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlage 966*.

² AGp B Telecon, 0030, 31 Jul, *AGp B KTB; AGp B Msg*, 31 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*, p. 206.

³ Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 0100, 31 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*. This and the telephone conversations from the *Seventh Army Telephone Journal* that follow appear also in First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 114ff.

At 0920 Kluge learned definitely that the Americans were in Avranches, but other than that the entire situation in the Avranches-Villedieu sector was "completely unclear." The only facts that could be accepted with assurance were that German losses in men and equipment were high and that U.S. fighter-bomber activity was "unprecedented." An "umbrella" of planes had covered American tanks advancing on Granville and Avranches. The responsibility for the crisis, he insisted, lay with Hausser's order for the left wing of the *LXXXIV Corps* to attack to the southeast. He had discovered that Choltitz had protested Hausser's order, and he felt that this futile protest absolved Choltitz from blame for the subsequent disaster. Troops under the control of the *91st Division* had established a thin line from Bréhal to Cérences as early as 28 July, but the American penetration on 31 July near Cérences had "ripped open the whole western front." The inevitable conclusion was that "Villedieu, springboard for movement east and south, is the anchor-point for Brittany, [and] has to be held under all circumstances or else has to be recaptured."⁴ But Kluge could do no more than draw conclusions; without an organized front and without adequate communications, he was powerless to influence the course of events.

Fifteen minutes later, Kluge's greatest worry was still Villedieu. He did not know nor could he find out which side held the town. Suspecting the worst, he agreed to let the *XLVII Panzer Corps* pull back the *2d* and *116th*

⁴ Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 0920, 31 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*; *Seventh Army KTB*, 28 Jul.

Panzer Divisions to the Villedieu-Percy line. He knew that east of the Vire River, in the withdrawal toward the town of Vire, the *II Parachute Corps* had lost the greater part of the *3d Parachute Division* (including the *15th Parachute Regiment* attached to it). He knew also that the *21st Panzer Division*, the last reserve division in Normandy, had been committed on the left flank of *Panzer Group West*, where the *326th Infantry Division* had been overrun by the British.⁵

Satisfied that he could do little on the front east of Avranches except hope for the best, Kluge set out to block the Americans at Avranches. At first he thought he could bring up two infantry divisions—the *84th* and *89th*—to deal with the small armored spearheads there, but he soon realized that the divisions could not possibly arrive in time.⁶ He then turned to the forces in Brittany.

Since early on the morning of 31 July, when Kluge first faced the difficult and distasteful conclusion that the front was disintegrating, he had tried to get troops to hold the bridge near Pontaubault.⁷ Unsuccessful in this effort, he took the drastic step of stripping the Brittany defenses by ordering Fahrmbacher, who commanded the *XXV Corps* in Brittany, to denude the St. Malo area of forces in order to prohibit the influx of Americans into Brittany. Specifically, Fahrmbacher was to send all available mobile troops to hold the Pontaubault bridge and from there to launch

⁵ Telecon, Kluge and Gersdorff, 0935, 31 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*; Hodgson, R-54 and R-58.

⁶ These divisions reached the Normandy front on 4 and 6 August. Hodgson, R-54.

⁷ Telecon, Kluge and Zimmerman, 0210, 31 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlage 952*.

a counterattack to the north to recapture Avranches.

Fahrmbacher was handicapped in two respects. Though there were many unemployed naval and air force troops in his corps sector, he could not order them to assume ground force missions because they were not under his jurisdiction. The troops directly under his control and therefore available to him were generally of two types—static troops guarding the coast line and units that had escaped from the Cotentin after taking heavy losses. Both lacked sufficient transport to make them mobile. Fahrmbacher felt that he could not perform his mission at Avranches, but he tried anyway.⁸

Fahrmbacher dispatched toward Pontaubault what remained of the *77th Division*, a unit perhaps the equivalent of a battalion in strength, reinforced by assorted paratroopers and a company of assault guns. This force, under Col. Rudolf Bacherer, the *77th Division* commander, reached the vicinity of Pontaubault in the late afternoon of 31 July, only to find the Americans already there.⁹

Hours before this took place, Kluge had reported to Hitler through Warlimont that he did not think it at all possible to stop the Americans, who had broken out of the strong static defenses that had contained them in July.¹⁰ Hitler's "stand fast and hold" tactics, it appeared, had failed.

⁸ Telecon, Kluge and Fahrmbacher, 1000, 31 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*; MS # 731 (Fahrmbacher).

⁹ *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*, 31 Jul; *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, I, 129-30.

¹⁰ Telecon, Kluge and Warlimont, 1045, 31 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Jnl*.

The Explanation

How had it happened? How had an operation designed to reach the Coutances-Caumont line been parlayed from a breakthrough into a breakout?

The explanation could be likened to a double exposure of the same subject, filmed from different points of view. The edges of the picture were slightly blurred, but the result was clearly discernible.

The Germans had astutely escaped the initial COBRA thrusts, only to fall prey to the later developments. They had been completely surprised by the COBRA bombardment and ground attack of 25 July. And yet they themselves had aggravated the consequences. That they had been outmaneuvered was soon apparent. Their communications facilities wrecked, they had found their endeavors to re-establish order marked by ignorance and inevitable frustration. Unable to keep abreast of a COBRA operation that developed remarkable speed after a slow beginning, the Germans were too late in their countermeasures. Hampered by shortages of manpower, equipment, and supplies, they were also the victims of their own mistakes.

Whereas Eberbach had launched major portions of two panzer divisions in a counterattack several hours after Goodwood had begun and had thereby blocked British exploitation of a penetration already achieved, the Germans in the Cotentin were not able to match or even come close to Eberbach's accomplishment. A large part of the confusing and conflicting drama that had ensued in the Cotentin could in the final analysis be traced to the failure of a few men to react quickly, with deci-

sion, and in accord with a single purpose.¹¹

At the beginning, German intelligence had failed. Radio interception had revealed significant changes in American dispositions during the week preceding COBRA, but these were not reflected in the reports that reached army group and theater headquarters. They did not even reach Hausser.¹²

More important than the lack of advance warning on COBRA and perhaps even more significant than the disparity in numbers of troops controlled by the opponents were Hausser's dispositions before COBRA, which had largely predetermined his initial reaction. From the night of 13 July, when American pressure against the *LXXXIV Corps* left began to diminish, Hausser was increasingly free to regroup his forces because except for minor action the fighting in the Cotentin came to an end with the fall of St. Lô on 18 July. A week of poor weather conditions before COBRA gave Hausser further respite. In all, he had about ten days to reshuffle his forces in the Cotentin. The equivalent of nearly seven infantry divisions, these forces had numbered about 21,000 combat effectives. The infantry was incapable of rapid movement, but Hausser had two panzer divisions that were highly mobile. Even though *Panzer Lehr* had not been at top strength (it had been unable—even with the support of its attached parachute regiment—to launch an attack east of the Vire River

¹¹ See Hodgson, R-58; MS # B-723 (Gersdorff) is a valuable source.

¹² Seventh Army KTB, 22-24 Jul; OB WEST KTB, Anlagen Ic Anlageband II, Feindlagekarten 1.VII.-31.XII.44, Annexes 27 and 28; MS # B-464 (Ziegelmann).

to regain St. Lô), the *2d SS Panzer Division* had been strong, confident, and aggressive.¹³ Together, the two armored divisions comprised a force in being that could have had a serious effect on COBRA.

Kluge had suggested to Hausser that he pull his two panzer divisions out of the line, replace them with infantry, and conserve them for mobile action against American penetrations of the defensive line. Hausser, on the other hand, had been reluctant to deprive his static defense of armor. He believed that "tanks formed the backbone of the position; built into the ground, they served as antitank guns and as armored machine guns."¹⁴ He had consequently held the armored divisions in place.

As a result, instead of having the infantry absorb the shock of the COBRA assault and having an armored reserve capable of counterattack, Hausser had so disposed his troops that the Americans knocked out one of the two panzer divisions in the COBRA bombardment—*Panzer Lehr* was immediately eliminated as a potential threat. The *2d SS Panzer Division*, though more fortunate than *Lehr* in escaping bombardment, could not be extricated from the front in time for a decisive counterattack role. Once the Americans broke through, their mechanized and motorized troops easily outmaneuvered German infantrymen and paratroopers who comprised Hausser's immediate reserves, forces that were sadly deficient in transportation facilities. Without additional assembled reserves, Hausser could not close the gap

¹³ Hechler, The Enemy Build-up Prior to Operation COBRA; MS #159 (Stueckler).

¹⁴ MS # A-903 (Bayerlein).

that developed between the *LXXXIV* and *II Parachute Corps*.

By the very terrain his troops occupied, Hausser might have visualized his task as the maintenance of a resilient defense. He might have envisaged a gradual hard-fought withdrawal, if necessary, to the Avranches-Vire-Caen line (which Rundstedt and Rommel had discussed around the end of June), for such a withdrawal would have been in accord with the defensive concept in Normandy. Eberbach, in contrast, could not withdraw his *Panzer Group West* and retain for the forces in Normandy the same conditions of warfare. Despite the impossibility of his even considering a withdrawal and despite his lack of intention to withdraw, Eberbach had constructed alternate positions to the rear. Hausser, who could have justified a withdrawal and who could have given up ground without endangering the forces of *Army Group B*, had failed to prepare even rally points to the rear.

Though Hausser had not designated alternate positions, Choltitz was sufficiently security conscious—perhaps simply cautious enough—to do so on his own authority. Afraid to appear a defeatist in Hausser's eyes, Choltitz did not tell him of the alternate positions. The relationship between the two commanders was founded on a lack of mutual trust, co-operation, and understanding that bred confusion. When Choltitz had marked a line of defense to the rear, he had been responsible for the defense of the Cotentin from the west coast to the Vire River. After the fall of St. Lô, when the *352d Division* withdrew behind the Vire River west of St. Lô and took positions on the west bank,

Hausser allowed it to remain under the control of the *II Parachute Corps*. Thus, when Choltitz shortly after the COBRA bombardment ordered *Panzer Lehr* to man a designated line to the rear, the consequence was that *Lehr* had neither contact with the *352d* nor an anchor on the Vire River. Both units had floating flanks. When the *352d* withdrew a day later to anchor the flanks, *Panzer Lehr* had been further jostled by the COBRA exploitation and was beyond salvation.¹⁵

Kluge shared in the accountability for defeat. Concerned with the *Panzer Group West* sector and worried about the positions south of Caen, he had failed to note Hausser's inadequate preparations for defense. It should have been clear to him that Hausser had not grasped the role of the *Seventh Army* in the defense of Normandy.¹⁶ Yet Kluge was preoccupied with the British threat to Falaise, and he did not remark Hausser's failure to comply with his instructions on creating armored reserves.

Kluge criticized Hausser explicitly soon after COBRA began for his employment of the *2d SS Panzer Division*. He condemned Hausser's helplessness in the face of communications difficulties. He thought that Hausser was permitting inefficiency among army staff members, particularly his chief of staff, General-major Max Pemsel, who, Kluge felt, would hamper Hausser's influence on

¹⁵ See MS # B-418 (Choltitz); MS # B-489 (Ziegelmann); MS # P-159 (Stueckler); MS # B-179 (Hausser); *Pz Lehr Div FO*, 23 Jul, *Pz Lehr Div Ib KTB, Allg. Anlagen*, Annex 241.

¹⁶ See Hausser's Est of the Situation, 19 Jul, and Kluge's forwarding letter, 21 Jul, *AGp B Ia Lagebeurteilungen und Wochenmeldungen*.

the course of the battle.¹⁷ He thought it necessary to restrain Hausser's request to withdraw, and he had insisted on withdrawal only for the purpose of gaining reserves. On the morning of 28 July he remarked that Hausser and Pemsel were obviously not masters of the situation and that he had just about decided to relieve at least Pemsel.¹⁸ That same morning he sent his son Guenther, a lieutenant colonel who was his aide, to the *Seventh Army* sector as his personal representative.

The climax of Kluge's doubt came on the question of Coutances. Though Kluge considered closing the gap in the *Seventh Army* center vital, he felt that retention of Coutances was even more important. When Pemsel assured Kluge on 28 July that strong rear-guard action north of Coutances would keep the Americans out of the city and prevent them from launching a major effort along the coast, Kluge was certain that Hausser understood the significance of Coutances—that loss of Coutances would open the door to an American drive that might outflank the counterattack about to be launched in the army center by the *XLVII Panzer Corps*.¹⁹ His surprise bordered on shock when he received word that evening of Hausser's plan to have the *LXXXIV Corps* in the Coutances area escape American encirclement by attacking southeast, rather than by withdrawing south along the coast. By virtually abandoning Coutances and projecting a concentration of

forces near Percy, Hausser removed opposition to an American advance down the west coast of the Cotentin.

Kluge's countermand of Hausser's order had little effect because of inadequate communication facilities. A result was that Hausser's act brought to a head Kluge's dissatisfaction with the *Seventh Army* leadership. That evening, though apparently without authority to relieve Hausser, who was one of Himmler's SS commanders, or perhaps not daring to, Kluge replaced Pemsel with Gersdorff; Choltitz, the *LXXXIV Corps* commander, with Generalleutnant Otto Elfeldt.²⁰ Kluge must have regretted that Hausser still commanded the *Seventh Army* on the following day, for again he countermanded Hausser's order committing the *XLVII Panzer Corps* to defense between Tessy and Gavray.

By the time that Kluge took an active part in the Cotentin operation, the battle was lost. Even though he drew upon Eberbach's *Panzer Group West* reserves in an attempt to stem the tide of events, he did so with reluctance, not because Goodwood had exhausted those operational reserves concentrated south of Caen, but because in the midst of the COBRA deluge he still believed that the decisive action would take place on the eastern flank near Caen. Kluge was, of course, mistaken.

German errors were only part of the story. The breakout also illustrated the magnificent ability of American commanders to take advantage of the opportunities and transform a limited envelopment in process to a breakthrough that became a breakout.

¹⁷ Telecon, Kluge, Pemsel, and Tempelhoff, 1845, 26 Jul, AGp B KTB.

¹⁸ Telecon, Kluge to Warlimont, 0925, 28 Jul, AGp B KTB.

¹⁹ Telecon, Kluge and Pemsel, 1640, 28 Jul, AGp B KTB.

²⁰ Hodgson, R-40.

The abortive COBRA bombardment on 24 July had acted as a ruse. It had given the Germans a false sense of confidence and had nailed down the German main line of defense along the Périers-St. Lô highway. The real bombardment on 25 July had smashed the defense in the Marigny-St. Gilles gap. Though not at first apparent, the massed heavy and medium bomber attack had destroyed the efficiency and the initiative of the German soldier, both as an individual and as a member of the combat team, and had provided American ground troops with an initial impetus that turned out to be decisive.

To the Germans, the mere presence of unopposed aircraft overhead had been depressing, but the bombing itself had produced a temporary demoralization and a loss of will to fight or even to move about in the area under attack, a psychological effect that had given the Americans a tremendous tactical advantage. German casualties were later conservatively estimated as 10 percent of the total troops in the area. Even more important than the casualties were the confusion, the disruption of communications, and the shock effect. Some German soldiers were still deaf twenty-four hours later. Despite the bomb casualties among American troops, despite the fact that small isolated German groups had still been able to resist after the bombing, the COBRA bombardment was later judged to have been the best example in the European theater of "carpet bombing."²¹

The small and isolated German groups in the Marigny-St. Lô gap that

had been able to resist had performed so well that they had maintained a semblance of the opposition that had stopped the Americans in the battle of the hedge-rows earlier in the month. Expecting the same kind of combat, American infantrymen had been afflicted with a caution that, in view of the lack of organized German defense, approached timidity.

Recognizing that the entire First Army attack depended on getting through the German defenses at once, General Collins had dissipated the hesitation marking the American ground attack on the first day of COBRA, 25 July, by committing his armor on the morning of 26 July. That act had insured COBRA's success, but the forces in the VII Corps main effort had not made the decisive thrust. Rather, the aggressiveness of General Brooks' 2d Armored Division and the single-minded leadership of General Rose had carried CCA, and with it the VII Corps, into the exploitation phase of COBRA.

Again sensing a critical moment, General Collins had ordered continued attack through the night of 26 July. It was this—in particular the activity of General Barton's 4th Division—that had rammed the COBRA attack home. Had the VIII Corps attacked during the night of 26 July, the Germans on the Cotentin west coast might not have slipped away in the dark to temporary escape.

The German miscalculations that had allowed the COBRA attack to cross the original relatively limited horizon and had made possible the post-COBRA opportunity for exploitation were quickly seized upon by General Bradley. Despite strong German forces between

²¹ USSAFE, Intelligence Study on Effectiveness of Carpet Bombing, 21 Feb 45, Hist Sec AF File, Carpet Bombing.

Lessay and Périers and despite the ability of German forces at Marigny to keep the COBRA main effort toward Coutances from reaching fruition, General Bradley exploited and deepened a nascent disorganization of the enemy as disastrous as that caused by the heavy bombers, as compelling as the effect of the American ground attack.

With the chief COBRA premise invalidated because the Germans had eluded not only the principal COBRA envelopment to Coutances but also the subsidiary thrust, the Americans closed another trap with alacrity around Ronceny. Hausser's premature anticipation of the encirclement of his west coast forces—a maneuver that was never actually completed—and his order for the troops on the left to attack toward the southeast would have had little effect on the ultimate result if American troops had not been in place to block them—in particular the 2d Armored Division and General White's CCB, which had displayed a ruthlessness in its destructive capacity. The German hold on the Cotentin west coast broken and the way thereby open not only to an encirclement of the *LXXXIV Corps* left but also to the much more serious encirclement of the entire German defensive line in France, the Americans again acted with dispatch.

With the Germans themselves having largely planted the seeds of their own destruction, "it was only necessary for the First Army to take advantage of the disorganized state of the enemy." General Bradley had not been at all hesitant about issuing his orders for the post-COBRA exploitation. "Consequently, the ensuing period, which the

[COBRA] plan had conceived [of as] . . . a holding and mopping-up period, became a vigorous attack period."²² General Corlett's XIX Corps had blunted the enemy's planned counterattack at Tessy and had thereby destroyed German hopes of quickly re-establishing a defensive line in the Cotentin. General Collins' rapid reorganization of the VII Corps and the spectacular thrust of 3d Armored Division task forces toward St. Pois and to Brécey had denied the Germans the vital terrain about Ville-dieu-les-Poëles. General Patton's modification of the VIII Corps attack by inserting twin armored columns and the sensational success of General Wood's 4th Armored Division had exploded the nightmare of static warfare that had haunted the Americans so long in the Cotentin.

The British and Canadian contributions to the development of the breakout are difficult to judge. There is no doubt that General Montgomery had worried Kluge in the Caen sector. By creating uncertainty in the mind of the German field commander, Montgomery had added to and deepened the surprise that accompanied the American operation. Except for two armored divisions that had moved to the American zone to oppose the post-COBRA exploitation, Montgomery had tied down the strength of *Panzer Group West*, which still guarded the vital approaches to Falaise. Whether General Montgomery had visualized it so, or whether he was aware of the historical example, the breakout in Normandy from a larger

²² First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 106-07.

perspective resembled in the essentials of maneuver the operation in Sicily of less than a year earlier. There, too, Montgomery's forces had tied down the enemy while Patton's U.S. troops carried the main assault and made the striking gain.

Two days before COBRA, General Montgomery had suggested it might be advantageous to drop parachute troops to seize bridgeheads over the Sée and Sélune Rivers—to block a German retreat, to prevent the enemy from stabilizing his line at Avranches, and to facilitate the projected American thrust into Brittany. General Bradley had vetoed this relatively shallow drop.²³ As it turned out, an airborne operation was unnecessary.

General Eisenhower had sounded the keynote when he had written General Bradley on the eve of COBRA:

My high hopes and best wishes ride with you in your attack . . . , which is the largest ground assault yet staged in this war by American troops exclusively. Speaking as the responsible American rather than the Allied Commander, I assure you that . . . a breakthrough at this juncture will minimize the total cost [of victory]. . . . Pursue every advantage with an ardor verging on recklessness and with all your troops without fear of major counter offensive from the forces the enemy now has on his front. . . . The results will be incalculable.²⁴

The results were indeed incalculable. Of the 28,000 German prisoners the First Army captured during the month of July, 20,000 were taken during the last six days. No German defensive

capability was apparent in the Pontaubault-Brécey-Villedieu-les-Poëles sector. The *LXXXIV Corps* was smashed. The *II Parachute Corps* was beaten. The *Seventh Army* had been defeated. The way was open to even greater German disaster and even more incalculable results.²⁵

The Allied Outlook

The action that had developed so rapidly on the First Army's right during the last few days of July was a preview of what was to come in August. Significantly, armored units had transformed the breakthrough into the breakout in all of the three corps sectors west of the Vire River. Even in the region east of the Vire, the British 11th Armoured Division had manifested the type of slashing power inherent in armored formations.

On the First Army right, the combat command had become the basic unit of advance. In the VII Corps sector, a new combination had evolved: a combat command attached to each infantry division, imparting the armored characteristics of fire power, mobility, and shock to the infantry capacity for sustained action. In all the corps sectors west of the Vire, balanced teams of tanks, tank destroyers, motorized infantry, artillery, and engineers had pushed ahead, making generous use of marching fire. The units had automatically taken cross-roads, road junctions, defensible terrain features, hedgerows, and buildings under fire in order to neutralize potential resistance. All forces in the exploitation had cut German telephone wires. Leading

²³ 21 AGp Msg, 23 Jul, and FUSA Msg, 23 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl.

²⁴ Ltr, Eisenhower to Montgomery for Bradley, 24 Jul, FWD-12438, Pogue Files.

²⁵ FUSA G-2 Per Rpt 52, 1 Aug.