

prisoners were captured. The motorized 79th Division, advancing toward Nogent-le-Roi, met hardly a German and on 16 August established a bridgehead on the east bank of the Eure River, thirty-seven miles from Paris.³⁰

Although capture of Orléans and Chartres had placed the XII and XX Corps within striking distance of Paris, the approach to the French capital from Dreux was shorter and considered better. Five bridges across the Eure and a good road net afforded more than adequate accommodations for military movement.³¹ Despite the attractiveness and the importance of Paris—the most vital communications center in France—the Seine River, not the city, became the foremost Allied objective.

To the Seine and Across

General Bradley had limited General Patton to Dreux, Chartres, and Orléans primarily because of logistical problems. The essential difficulty was that the supply services did not have enough transportation to keep up with the breakout from the Cotentin and the spectacular momentum of the Allied advance.³² It was obvious after the first week in August that the combat gains were outstripping the capacity of the Communications Zone to keep the units adequately supplied. Because of the rapidity of troop movement and the relative paucity of targets, ammunition was less a prob-

lem than were gasoline and rations.³³ Gasoline consumption, which skyrocketed, and ration requirements, which remained constant, threatened to bring operations to a halt.

In order to keep the troops moving, Allied commanders looked to air supply.³⁴ Nevertheless, only small amounts of supplies actually arrived on the Continent by air in early August, primarily because transport planes were being held in readiness for possible airborne operations at Orléans and Chartres. Once the two cities were captured, use of the transports was less restricted. On 19 August twenty-one C-47's landed forty-seven tons of rations near le Mans in the first delivery of what was to become a daily emergency airlift to the Third Army.³⁵

Although this emergency measure hardly promised to make up all shortages, the temptation to take advantage of the weak enemy opposition at Dreux, Chartres, and Orléans (despite the local resistance at Chartres) was irresistible. After meeting with Hodges and Patton to discuss "spheres of influence" and "zones of action," Bradley on 17 August removed his restriction on going beyond the confines of the OVERLORD lodgment area to the Seine. Since the main enemy forces were concentrated west of the lower Seine (north of Paris), Allied troops advancing to the Seine would in

³³ The Gen Bd, USFET, Rpt on Ammo Supply for FA, Study No. 58, File 471/1, p. 19.

³⁴ Ltr, Eisenhower to Montgomery, 2 Aug, SGS SHAEF File 381, OVERLORD I (a); SHAEF Msg S-57489, 12 Aug, Msgs, EXFOR Main to SHAEF, MGA-2, 14 Aug, SHAEF to EXFOR Main, FWD-12901, 15 Aug, and 12th AGp to SHAEF, Q-2050, 11 Aug, SGS SHAEF File 373/2.

³⁵ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 385; Bradley, *Effect of Air Power*, p. 71; Huston, *Biography of A Battalion*, pp. 370-72; TUSA AAR, Aug.

³⁰ XV Corps, 79th Div, 5th Armd Div AAR's, Aug; Wyche Diary; Notes of Mtg, 2000, 16 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File.

³¹ Notes of Mtg, 2000, 16 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File.

³² For detailed discussion, see Ch. XXXI, below.



GERMAN REMOVING BOOBYTRAP *under the eyes of a U.S. soldier.*

effect be extending to the river the lower jaw of the Allied trap, which already stretched from Argentan through Chambois to Dreux.³⁶

To conserve gasoline and other supplies, Patton held the XII Corps at Orléans. He instructed the XX Corps to complete the capture of Chartres and at the same time to assume responsibility for Dreux. He directed the XV Corps to drive twenty-five miles northeast from Dreux to the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt, a town thirty miles northwest of Paris. At Mantes, the XV Corps was to interdict the roads east of the river and disrupt German ferrying operations.³⁷

The 5th Armored and 79th Infantry

Divisions of the XV Corps, relieved at Dreux and Nogent-le-Roi by the 7th Armored Division, moved easily to Mantes-Gassicourt on 18 August, set up roadblocks to collect German stragglers, and placed interdictory artillery fire on the river-crossing sites. On the following day a task force of the 79th entered Mantes-Gassicourt and found the Germans gone.

On 19 August, while the XV Corps was discovering that no effective obstacle save the river itself barred a crossing of the Seine, the top Allied commanders were reaching agreement to modify further the OVERLORD planning. Instead of halting at the Seine to reorganize and build up a supply base west of the Seine, the Allied command decided to move immediately into post-OVERLORD operations directed toward Germany.³⁸

To drive across the upper Seine south of Paris and the lower Seine north of Paris would be a comparatively simple maneuver, but the presence of a considerable number of Germans between the Argentan-Falaise pocket and the lower Seine presented an opportunity to complete the destruction of the forces that had escaped the pocket. The Allies estimated that 75,000 enemy troops and 250 tanks could still be encircled west of the Seine.³⁹ If American troops drove down the west bank of the Seine from Mantes-Gassicourt, they might cut German escape routes, push the Germans toward the mouth of the Seine, where the river is wider and more diffi-

³⁶ 12th AGp Ltr and Ltr of Instrs 5, 17 Aug; see also XV Corps G-2 Per Rpt 15, 0300, 18 Aug, and Sylvan Diary, 17 Aug.

³⁷ TUSA Dirs, 17 and 18 Aug; Patton to Haislip, 17 Aug, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

³⁸ 12th AGp Memo for Rcd, 19 Aug, ML-205. For a detailed discussion of this decision, see Ch. XXX, below.

³⁹ Notes of Mtg, 2000, 19 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File.

cult to cross, and fashion another encirclement inside Normandy.

The major difficulty of a maneuver such as this was the same that had inhibited American activity north of Argentan. At Mantes, the XV Corps was again beyond the zone assigned to the 12th Army Group. Further advance toward the mouth of the Seine would place the corps across the projected routes of advance of the British and Canadian armies and would surely result in "an administrative headache."⁴⁰

Although General Bradley offered to lend trucks to transport British troops to Mantes-Gassicourt and suggested that the British move units through the American zone to launch the attack down the west bank of the river, General Dempsey declined with thanks on the basis that his logistical organization could not support such a move. For the Allies then to take advantage of the alluring possibilities at the Seine—disrupting the German withdrawal, bagging additional prisoners among the escapees from the Argentan-Falaise pocket, removing Germans from the British zone, and thus allowing Dempsey to move to the Seine against "almost negligible resistance"—General Montgomery would have to permit further intrusion of American troops into the British sector and accept in advance the administrative consequences. He, Bradley, and Dempsey decided to chance the headache.⁴¹

Having decided to send part of Patton's force down the west bank of the Seine, the Allied commanders saw a coincident opportunity to seize a bridge-

head on the east bank of the river as a springboard for future operations. The XV Corps thus drew a double mission—the 5th Armored was to attack down the west bank while the 79th established a bridgehead on the east bank. In his order issued on 20 August, Montgomery cautioned: "This is no time to relax, or to sit back and congratulate ourselves. . . . Let us finish off the business in record time."⁴² By then, American troops were already across the Seine.

General Wyche had received a telephone call at 2135, 19 August, from General Haislip, who ordered him to cross the Seine that night.⁴³ The 79th was to get foot troops on the east bank at once, build a bridge for vehicles, tanks, and heavy equipment, and gain ground in sufficient depth (four to six miles) to protect the crossing sites at Mantes from medium artillery fire.

In a situation that was "too fluid to define an enemy front line," General Wyche anticipated little resistance. His 79th Division had that day engaged only scattered German groups in flight, had captured nineteen vehicles and a Mark IV tank, and had received only sporadic machine gun fire from across the Seine. The river itself was the main problem, for near Mantes it varied in width from five hundred to eight hundred feet.

⁴² 21 AGp Gen Operational Situation and Dir, M-519, 20 Aug.

⁴³ The following account is taken from the XV Corps and 79th Div AAR's, Aug; Wyche Diary; XV Corps FO 6, 2330, 19 Aug. and G-2 Per Rpt 17, 0300, 20 Aug; Telecons, Menoher and Wyche, 2135, 19 Aug. and Col Menoher and Col Kramer Thomas, 1000, 20 Aug; Haislip Memo, 2100, 19 Aug; Notes of Mtg, 2000, 19 Aug; 314th Infantry Regiment, *Through Combat*, pp 27-30; *History of the 313th Infantry in World War II* (Washington, 1947), pp. 95-99; Interv with Capt Ernest Rothemberg, Hosp Intervs, ML-2234.

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 381.

⁴¹ See Ltr, Bradley to Eisenhower, 10 Sep, Pogue Files. For an interesting speculation, see Wilmot, *Struggle for Europe*, pp. 427-28.

Fortunately, a dam nearby offered a narrow foot path across it, and Engineer assault boats and rafts could transport other troops and light equipment. For the bridge he was to build, Wyche secured seven hundred feet of treadway from the 5th Armored Division.

While a torrential rain fell during the night of 19 August, men of the 313th Infantry walked across the dam in single file, each man touching the one ahead to keep from falling into the water. At daybreak, 20 August, as the 314th Infantry paddled across the river, the division engineers began to install the treadway. In the afternoon, as soon as the bridge was ready, the 315th Infantry crossed in trucks. By nightfall, 20 August, the bulk of the division, including tanks, artillery, and tank destroyers, was on the east bank. The following day battalions of the XV Corps Artillery crossed. Antiaircraft units hurriedly emplaced their pieces around the bridge, arriving in time to shoot down about a dozen enemy planes on the first day and to amass a total of almost fifty claimed in four days. To supplement the treadway, engineers constructed a Bailey bridge that was opened to traffic on 23 August. On the east bank, the 79th not only extended and improved the bridgehead, repelled counterattacks, and interdicted highways, ferry routes, and barge traffic lanes, but also dramatically pointed out to the Germans their critical situation by capturing the *Army Group B* command post at la Roche-Guyon and sending the German headquarters troops scurrying eastward to Soissons.⁴⁴

The Second Encirclement Attempt

Hitler was wrong on 20 August when he surmised that the Allies intended to capture Paris at once. Yet he guessed correctly that they would try to destroy the forces of *Army Group B* in the area between Argentan and the lower Seine, primarily by thrusting downstream along the west bank of the river. Hitler did not say how this was to be prevented, but he instructed Model to establish a defensive line at the Touques River with the admittedly "badly battered" *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies*. If Model found a defense at the Touques unfeasible, he was authorized to withdraw for a stand at the Seine. In this case, the *Fifth Panzer Army* was to provide reception facilities on the east bank of the Seine, protect crossings for the *Seventh Army*, and at the same time make contact with the *First Army*, which was to defend the Paris-Orléans gap and prevent an Allied advance toward Dijon.⁴⁵

Hitler obviously did not appreciate the extent of *Fifth Panzer Army* exhaustion, *Seventh Army* disorganization, and *First Army* weakness. Perhaps he was deluded by self-imposed blindness. Possibly he was the victim of the patently false reports and briefings that were later to become common practice. Perhaps he overestimated the effect of a not inconsiderable number of divisions that had been moving toward the battle zone in Normandy since the Mortain counterattack—the 6th Parachute, the 17th and 18th Luftwaffe Field, the 344th, 331st, 48th, and 338th Infantry—their purpose

⁴⁴ ETHINT 18 (Schwerin); *AGp B KTB*, 19 Aug.

⁴⁵ Hitler Order, 20 Aug, Msg, *FHQ*, 20 Aug, *OKW/WFSt/Op. Nr. 772956/44*, *OKW/175*.

to cover Paris and the *Army Group B* rear. In any event, though Hitler hoped to stop the Allies at the Touques or at the Seine, he was already preparing to organize the Somme–Marne River line for defense.⁴⁶

Model on 20 August subordinated the *Seventh Army* to the *Fifth Panzer Army* (perhaps because Hausser had been wounded and was evacuated), thereby giving Dietrich command of the entire area from the coast to the *First Army* boundary (Chartres–Rambouillet–northwest outskirts of Paris). On 21 August he spelled out Dietrich's mission. The *Fifth Panzer Army* was to occupy and hold during the night of 21 August the Touques River–Lisieux–Orbec–Laigle line. Because it was “of paramount importance” to bolster the eastern flank in the Eure sector, Model ordered Dietrich to move all the armored units fit for combat (except those of the *II SS Panzer Corps*) to the vicinity of Evreux, the area Model considered most threatened. The eventual task of these forces was to regain contact with the Paris defenses of the *First Army*. Because a firm hold on the Seine River between Vernon and the army boundary was a prerequisite to successful defense in that area, a corps headquarters was to be charged with building defenses there; the arrival of the *49th Division* at the Seine was to be accelerated by all available means. “I am stressing in particular,” Model stated, “the importance of

the sector between the Eure and the Seine River where an enemy breakthrough attempt to Louviers can be expected.” The *Fifth Panzer Army* was to absorb all the *Seventh Army* headquarters. The armored units of the *Seventh Army* unfit for combat were to be sent to the Beauvais–Senlis area for rehabilitation under the *LVIII Panzer Corps* headquarters. Other units of the *Seventh Army* temporarily unfit for combat were to be dispatched across the Seine for rehabilitation, construction of fortifications along the Seine, and defense of the river line.⁴⁷

In another order issued the same day, Model informed Dietrich that if the development of the situation required withdrawal behind the Seine, the withdrawal was to be carried out in four steps, through a series of three intermediate positions.⁴⁸

On that date Dietrich organized his army front into three corps sectors, with the *LXXXVI* on the coast, the *II SS Panzer* in the center, and the *LXXXI* on the left. In compliance with Model's directive, he dispatched an armored group to the Evreux area—the remnants of the *2d*, *1st SS*, and *12th SS Panzer Divisions* under *I SS Panzer Corps*.⁴⁹

Despite the orderly appearance of troop dispositions and unit boundaries on a map, the forces were weak. The *Seventh Army* could not even begin to

⁴⁷ Model Order to Dietrich (No. 6376/44), 21 Aug, *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, Anlage 37.

⁴⁸ Model to Dietrich (No. 6353/44), 21 Aug, *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, Anlage 38. Whether this preceded or followed the order cited immediately above is not clear. Though the numbering of the *Anlagen* suggests that it follows, the numbers on the documents suggest otherwise.

⁴⁹ Dietrich Order, 21 Aug, *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, *Anlagen*.

⁴⁶ *OB WEST KTB*, 8 Aug, *Anlagen 1218* and *1220*; *Telecons*, Tempelhoff and Metzke, 1150 and 1220, 8 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; MS # B-727 (Gersdorff); MS # B-807 (Kuntzen); Hitler Order, *WFSt/Op. Nr. 772830/44 g.Kdos. Chefs*, 11 Aug, quoted in *Msg, AGp B* to the armies, 0030, 12 Aug, *AGp B Fuehrer Befehle*; *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, p. 139.

prepare an accurate strength report, but Dietrich on 21 August instructed two corps of his army to count their men, tanks, and artillery pieces. The count was discouraging. The *I SS Panzer Corps* reported that the *10th SS Panzer Division* had only a weak infantry battalion (perhaps 300 men), no tanks, no guns; the *12th SS Panzer Division* had 300 men, 10 tanks, no artillery; the *1st SS Panzer Division* was unable to give any figures. The *II SS Panzer Corps* reported that the *2d SS Panzer Division* had 450 men, 15 tanks, 6 guns; the *9th SS Panzer Division* had 460 men, 20 to 25 tanks, and 20 guns; the *116th Panzer Division* had one battalion of infantry (perhaps 500 or 600 men), 12 tanks, and no artillery.

A week later the strength of these divisions, plus that of the *21st Panzer Division*—all that remained of Model's armored forces—totaled 1,300 men, 24 tanks, and 60 artillery pieces.⁵⁰

In that intervening week the Allies were driving toward the Seine.

When the XV Corps had been ordered to thrust downstream along the west bank of the Seine from Mantes-Gassicourt and clear the area between the Eure and Seine Rivers, General Hodges (after a conference with Generals Bradley and Montgomery) had been instructed to assist with the First U.S. Army. Hodges was to use the XIX Corps, which had been pinched out of the western portion (upper jaw) of the Argentan-Falaise pocket. In the same kind of displacement from the upper to

the lower jaw that the V Corps headquarters had made from Tinchebray to Argentan, the XIX Corps and its divisions were to displace more than a hundred miles in a large and complicated troop movement from the vicinity of Flers to cover the gap between the V and XV Corps—from Gacé to Dreux. The corps moved and by 19 August was concentrated (with the 2d Armored, 28th, and 30th Divisions) in the Mortagne-Brezolles area. From there the XIX Corps was to attack north toward the Seine. The XIX and XV Corps would thus fashion a two-corps drive straddling the Eure River, with the divisions of the XIX on the left attacking to Elbeuf and XV (5th Armored Division) on the right attacking to Louviers.⁵¹

The *LXXXI Corps*, which since 16 August had had the difficult mission of screening the south flank of both German armies in Normandy from Gacé to Paris, was scheduled to defend the Eure River line. When parts of the *344th Division* (a static division released by the *Fifteenth Army*) arrived near Gacé on 17 August, conglomerate forces under the headquarters of *Panzer Lehr* were pulled out of the line and sent east of the Seine for rehabilitation. Soon afterwards, portions of the *6th Parachute* and *331st Divisions* came into the sector and were committed on the *344th* left (east). The *17th Luftwaffe Field Division*, previously employed at Le Havre as a static division, took positions near Dreux so hastily that its commitment could not be executed in an orderly or unified manner. These units were far from im-

⁵⁰ Telecon, Rotbers and Tempelhoff, 1545, 21 Aug, and *Fifth Pz Army Rpt*, 0650, 28 Aug, *AGP B KTB*.

⁵¹ 12th AGP Ltr of Instrs 5, 17 Aug, Addenda to Ltr of Instrs 5, 19 Aug, and Memos for Rcd, 18 and 19 Aug; Telecon, Patton to Haislip, 19 Aug, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File; Sylvan Diary, 19 Aug.

pressive; besides being understrength, they were poorly trained. Yet an SS captain named Wahl, the trains commander of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*, had on his own initiative been gathering tanks from all sources (for the most part from the *2d SS*, *9th SS*, and *2d Panzer Divisions*), principally replacement tanks on their way to units; Wahl assembled these to protect the Seine crossing sites. On 19 August combat remnants of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadiers* under Fick joined Wahl. Two days later contingents of the *1st SS Panzer Division* provided further reinforcement between the Eure and the Seine, and the whole improvised formation became known as *Kampfgruppe Mohnke*.⁵²

While the 79th Division started across the Seine on the evening of 19 August, a 5th Armored Division liaison officer was carrying from the corps headquarters to the division command post the order to drive downstream. Rain and a black night prevented him from reaching the division until shortly before dawn, 20 August. A few hours later armored units were moving. Referring not only to the celerity of execution of the corps order but also to the Seine crossing, General Haislip declared, "What we did last night was a Lulu."⁵³ There was no doubt about it.

⁵² MS # B-741 (Ziegelman); MS # B-680 (Hoecker); MS # B-727 (Gersdorff); *17th SS Engineer Battalion KTB*; *LXXXI Corps KTB* (17 Aug), and *Anlagen*; *Msg, 17th Luftwaffen Feld Div to LXXXI Corps*, 2040, 19 Aug, *LXXXI Corps Tagesmeldungen*; *Order of Battle Annex 2, 17 Luftwaffen Feld Div* (Air Force Field Division), 18 Aug, attached to XV Corps G-2 Per Rpt 16, 0300, 19 Aug. Principal German sources for this section are MS # B-034 (Schramm), MS # B-807 (Kuntzen), MS # B-445 (Krueger); see also 5th Armd Div G-2 Per Rpts, 20-25 Aug.

⁵³ Notes of Mtg, 0900, 20 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File.

The object of the armored drive down the Seine was to force the Germans as close to the mouth of the river as possible. Between Mantes-Gassicourt and Rouen, the Seine, averaging some five hundred feet in width, was suitable in many places for bridging and had many ferry slips. North of Rouen, the width of one thousand to twelve hundred feet and the tidal range would present the Germans with more hazardous and difficult crossings.⁵⁴

The first objective of the attack between the Eure and the Seine was to cut the German escape routes leading to the Seine River crossings between Vernon and Pont de l'Arche. Though Montgomery's order issued on 20 August directed an advance "to Louviers, and Elbeuf, and beyond," Patton on the previous evening had instructed Haislip to drive on Louviers and Elbeuf, the latter forty miles from Mantes, until relieved by elements of the XIX Corps; the 5th Armored Division was then to return to Mantes-Gassicourt. A day later Patton limited Haislip and told him to deny the Germans the use of crossing sites as far north as Louviers until relieved by XIX Corps on his left. Haislip designated Louviers, thirty miles from Mantes, as the final objective, and Maj. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver, the division commander, indicated intermediate objectives at Vernon and at the loop of the Seine near les Andelys, ten and twenty miles from Mantes, respectively.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ SHAEF G-3 Div Note on Assault Across the River Seine, 3 Jul, 12th AGp Mil Objs, 11.

⁵⁵ Patton to Haislip, 1830, 19 Aug, XV Corps G-3 Jnl and File; TUSA Dir, 20 Aug; XV Corps FO 6, 2230, 19 Aug; 5th Armd Div AAR, Aug; 21 AGp Dir, M-519, 20 Aug.

Almost immediately after leaving their positions about eight miles northwest of Mantes on 20 August, the 5th Armored Division ran into strong opposition from the *kampfgruppe* of panzer elements commanded successively by Wahl, Fick, and Col. Wilhelm Mohnke. The Germans fought skillfully, using to good advantage terrain features favorable for defense, numerous ravines and woods in particular. Fog and rain that continued for several days provided additional cover for German ambush parties using *Panzerfausts* and antitank grenades against American tanks. It took the armored division five days of hard fighting to advance about twenty miles and accomplish its mission.

At 0600, 24 August, XV Corps passed from the control of Third Army to that of First Army. On that day General Hodges informed General Haislip that, starting on the following morning, Second British Army elements (belonging largely to the 30 Corps) were to cross the American zone north of the Pacy-sur-Eure–Mantes–Gassicourt highway and close to the Seine. Haislip was to move the 5th Armored Division south of the British area by 0800, 25 August, leaving reconnaissance troops along the Seine until British relief.⁵⁶

This order also affected the XIX Corps on the XV Corps left. The XIX Corps had assembled its three divisions in the Mortagne–Brezolles area and on 20 August attacked with two divisions abreast—the 2d Armored on the left to advance on the Verneuil–Elbeuf axis, the 30th on the right to attack through Nonan-

court to Autheuil on the Eure River. General Corlett echeloned the 28th Division to the left rear to protect the corps west flank.⁵⁷

General Brooks's 2d Armored Division forced crossings over the Avre River, bypassed Verneuil, leaving its reduction to the 28th Division, and continued toward Breteuil. Despite rain, mud, and poor visibility, the armor continued to advance rapidly, bypassing Breteuil, leaving it also to the 28th, and rushed headlong through Conches and le Neubourg toward the Seine. Opposition from the 17th *Luftwaffe Field Division* and the 344th and 331st Divisions just melted away. Small pockets of infantrymen were easily swept into prisoner of war cages, and jammed columns of motorized and horse-drawn vehicles were smashed, burned, or captured.⁵⁸ A counterattack launched by the LXXXI Corps with elements of the 1st SS, 2d SS, 2d, and 116th Panzer Divisions had little effect; German troops manifested a stronger inclination to get to the Seine ferries than to fight.

By 24 August 2d Armored Division spearheads were at the southern outskirts of Elbeuf. There they struck stubborn resistance.

From the beginning of the American attack west of the Seine on 20 August, Model and Dietrich had focused their attention on developments occurring on

⁵⁷ FUSA Ltrs of Instrs, Hodges to Gerow, 17 Aug (confirming verbal orders, 16 Aug), and Hodges to Corlett, 18 Aug; XIX Corps FO 16, 2030, 19 Aug; [Ferriss], Notes.

⁵⁸ Telecon, Gause and Schneider, 0430, 23 Aug. LXXXI Corps KTB. Pvt. Bennie F. Boatright of the Medical Detachment, 41st Armored Infantry, was killed as he courageously went to the aid of wounded soldiers. He was posthumously awarded the DSC.

⁵⁶ XV Corps and 5th Armd Div AAR's, Aug; XV Corps G-2 Per Rpt 20, 0200, 23 Aug; FUSA Ltr of Instr, 24 Aug.

the *Fifth Panzer Army* south flank. The relentless pressure exerted by the XIX and XV Corps during four days rolled up the panzer army left flank for almost half the length of the army front. Model's plan, outlined on 21 August, for an orderly retrograde movement in four successive phases, came to naught, and the units on the northern flank of the army, those facing the British, had to accelerate their withdrawal.

All desperate efforts to check the American advance by the weak remnants of panzer divisions, some of which had to be pulled from other parts of the front where they were also badly needed, were to no avail. On 24 August, when American spearheads were approaching Elbeuf, the German commanders foresaw the danger that the remainder of the army might be cut off from the Seine crossings. They therefore deployed the battered splinters of eight panzer divisions along the southern part of the front, between the Risle and Seine Rivers.⁵⁹

This force, representing the concentration of armored units on the southern flank of the German bridgehead west of the Seine—with part under the *II SS Panzer Corps* and part under the *116th Panzer Division* (once again commanded by Schwerin)—had the mission of protecting the Seine crossings to Rouen. It defended Elbeuf, but not for long.

On 25 August CCA of the 2d Armored Division, reinforced by a combat team of General Cota's 28th Division, launched a co-ordinated attack on Elbeuf and entered the town. The troops secured Elbeuf on the following day, then

turned it over to Canadians arriving from the west.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, General Hobbs' 30th Division on the XIX Corps right had advanced against sporadic resistance and on 23 August, without opposition, occupied Evreux, bypassed by the 2d Armored Division. The 30th remained in its positions and in corps reserve on 24 August. On the following day, upon corps order, two regiments moved north to ground west and south of Louviers, thereby cutting the roads into town from the west. Patrols found Louviers abandoned by the Germans.⁶¹

While the XIX and XV Corps were clearing the Eure area from Mantes-Gassicourt to Elbeuf, British and Canadian troops were approaching the Seine from the west. The First Canadian Army had been attacking eastward since 16 August, when units crossed the Dives River in the coastal sector near Mézidon. British airborne troops under Canadian control broadened the offensive by attacking in the marshes near Cabourg. Progress against the German forces that had not been involved in the Argentan-Falaise action was slow, for the withdrawal by the German units outside the pocket was well planned and orderly, with demolitions, obstacles, and mines left in wake of the rear guards. The Canadian army did not reach and cross the Touques River until 22 August, when the 1st Belgian Infantry Brigade,

⁶⁰ ETHINT 18 (Schwerin); 2d Armd and 28th Div AAR's, Aug; see Charles Brisson, "La Libération d'Elbeuf et la Bataille dans la Vallée de la Seine," and André Bourlet, "Combats à Elbeuf," in Herval, *Bataille de Normandie*, II, 167-83 and 184-88.

⁶¹ 30th Div AAR, Aug; [Ferriss], Notes; see J. L. Cailly, "Louviers Libéré," in Herval, *Bataille de Normandie*, II, 160-61.

⁵⁹ See *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, 24 Aug.

moving along the coast, arrived at Deauville. On that day Montgomery released the 2d Canadian Corps for an advance to the Seine. Two days later units breached the Touques defenses at Lisieux. Bypassing the city, the Canadians drove on toward Bernay to maintain contact as the German withdrawal to the Seine began to accelerate. On 26 August Canadian forces were at Bourghtheroulde, where they relieved the XIX U.S. Corps of responsibility for Elbeuf. On the following day other Canadian forces in the coastal sector, among them the Royal Netherlands (Princess Irene's) Brigade, approached the mouth of the Seine.

Meanwhile, the Second British Army was also moving east, on the route through Bernay toward les Andelys and Louviers and along the highway through Gacé and Laigle toward Mantes-Gassicourt and Vernon. Little opposed the advance, and British troops met American forces of the XIX Corps at the Risle River.⁶²

During the last week of August the British and Canadians closed to the lower Seine from Vernon to the coast. In accordance with arrangements made on 24 August, Americans of the XIX and XV Corps withdrew along the west bank of the Seine south across the army group boundary. British and American columns alternately used crossroads and completed the transfer of territory with relative ease. The administrative head-

ache earlier envisioned never developed.⁶³

While the Americans were turning over part of the Seine's west bank to the British and Canadians, the Germans were trying desperately to maintain a semblance of order in what remained of their contracting bridgehead west of the Seine. Between 20 and 24 August, the Germans got about 25,000 vehicles to the east bank. But pressed against the west bank, the German units were fast being compressed into the wooded peninsular pieces of land formed by the loops of the river north of Elbeuf and Bourghtheroulde. As Allied artillery fire fell into this area, destroying vehicles and personnel jammed at entrances to river crossings, the Germans fought to maintain defensive lines and keep their escape facilities operating.

With *I SS Panzer Corps* in command of the *49th Infantry* and *18th Luftwaffe Field Divisions* on the east bank of the Seine generally south of Louviers, Dietrich on 24 August proposed a reorganization of command for those forces still west of the river—the *LXXXVI* and *LXXXI Corps* were to assume control of all the infantry divisions, the *II SS Panzer Corps* of all the armored divisions. On the following day he put it into effect. He drew his corps boundaries so that the *LXXXVI* controlled the units on the *Fifth Panzer Army* right,

⁶² Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 173, 176–77; Second Br Army Opns, 21 Jul–9 Sep, BAOR, 2 Nov 45, and Info furnished by 21 AGp to Hist Sec USFET, 9 Aug 45, ML-2251; Intentions Second British Army and First Canadian Army, 19, 20, 21, and 23 Aug, 12th AGp File 371.3 Mil Ops, Vol. I.

⁶³ FUSA Ltr of Instrs, Hodges to Haislip and Corlett, 24 Aug; XV Corps CofS Jnl and File, 23–26 Aug; First U.S. Army *Report of Operations*, I, 20; [Ferriss], Notes. Events during the month had moved so fast that defining the changing army group boundaries had proved to be a virtually impossible task until 21 August. See 21 AGp to SHAEF, 21 Aug, SHAEF File GCT 384–1/Ops (A), Boundaries of Armies and AGps.