



MAP 17



front. In the five-day action, the VII Corps had closed the gap on the XV Corps left flank, had taken more than 3,000 prisoners, and had destroyed a considerable amount of enemy equipment.<sup>21</sup>

Though VII Corps had been well on its way on 13 August to closing the gap on the XV Corps left, the XX Corps, recently committed under Third Army command, had also been involved.<sup>22</sup> The fluid situation had prompted some confusion. Events outran decisions, and communications conveyed outdated missions. The result was a comedy of errors.

The beginning of the story occurred on 8 August, when Patton had ordered Haislip's XV Corps to advance north from le Mans to secure the Sées-Carrouges line. He also alerted the XX Corps to the possibility of its commitment beside the XV—but on which side of the XV Corps the XX would eventually operate, the Third Army could not yet tell.<sup>23</sup> Three days later Third Army instructed XX Corps to assemble on the Mayenne-le Mans line for an attack to the northeast to secure the Sées-Carrouges line, the objective previously assigned to the XV Corps.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, Third Army had decided to commit the XX Corps on the XV Corps left. The only unit immediately avail-

<sup>21</sup> VII Corps AAR, FO 8 (and Incl 2 to Annex 2), 13 Aug (confirming oral orders, 12 Aug), Ops Memo 63, 11 Aug (confirming oral orders, 10 Aug), and Ops Memo 65, 13 Aug (confirming oral orders, 12 Aug); SHAEF G-3 Div, GCT/oo6.71/Ops (A), Ltr, Press Info—Falaise Gap, 20 Jun 45, SGS SHAEF File ooo.7, Vol. II; Ltr, Bradley to Eisenhower, 10 Sep, Pogue Files.

<sup>22</sup> For the commitment of the XX Corps, see below, Ch. XXVIII.

<sup>23</sup> TUSA Ltr of Instr, Patton to Haislip, 8 Aug.

<sup>24</sup> Dir, Gaffey to Walker, 11 Aug.

able to XX Corps was the 80th Division, which had been clearing the Evron area.

A day later, on 12 August, after telephone conversations between staff officers of both headquarters, Third Army, confirming the previous attack order, changed the corps objective. The XX Corps was to advance only until it came in contact with the XV Corps around Alençon (taken by the XV Corps that morning) or farther north, there to await further orders.<sup>25</sup> Completion of this mission would sweep clear the XV Corps left flank.

The XX Corps issued its field order close to midnight. In an area between VII Corps on its left and XV Corps on its right, XX Corps designated zones of advance for two divisions to attack abreast, the 80th on the right, the 7th Armored (recently arrived on the Continent and hurrying toward le Mans) on the left. Because the armored division would not arrive in the area until the afternoon of 13 August, XX Corps ordered the 80th Division to initiate the attack at 0800, 13 August; the armor was to follow, pass through the 80th, and take the lead. With two regiments abreast, the 80th was to attack from the Evron-Sillé-le-Guillaume area to capture the Argentan-Sées line. The north-easterly route of advance thus projected cut directly across roads being used by the XV Corps going north from Alençon toward Argentan. Evidently through oversight, the XX Corps field order made no mention of the Third Army instruction to hold the advance upon establishing contact with the XV Corps in the vicinity of Alençon or farther north.<sup>26</sup>

The 80th Division field order for the attack indicated the Argentan-Sées railroad line as its objective. The troops were to destroy hostile forces in zone and "establish contact with XV Corps Armd elms, when same cross Division front." The overlay designated routes of advance to the objective. It also showed a route presumably to be taken by "Armd elms XV Corps"—these elements would enter the 80th Division zone from Alençon and move through the Forêt d'Ecouves to Argentan, thereby cutting diagonally across the XX Corps zone, which was oriented to the northeast. Like the corps order, the division order made no mention of halting upon contact with XV Corps forces. Quite the contrary, "rapid progress . . . is essential to the success of the mission. Forces . . . will advance without regard to progress of forces to right and left."<sup>27</sup>

The attack jumped off on 13 August, and that afternoon the regiment on the right, the 318th Infantry, was hopelessly entangled with part of the 90th Division, which, under XV Corps command, was moving west of Alençon to protect the deep left flank of the corps. Intent on its own mission, the 318th cut across the 90th Division routes and precipitated serious traffic congestion and heated argument. The 90th ordered the 318th off the road. The 318th refused to move because it was sure it was on the right road to its objective. The 90th informed the 318th that another unit (under XV Corps command) had already captured and was occupying the 80th's objective. The 318th was adamant; its orders were clear and it planned to carry them out. The

---

<sup>25</sup> Dir, Gaffey to Walker, 12 Aug.

<sup>26</sup> XX Corps FO 2, 2345, 12 Aug.

---

<sup>27</sup> 80th Div FO 4, 0400, 13 Aug.

90th radioed XV Corps headquarters. The 318th radioed 80th Division headquarters. The XV Corps commander sent an officer down to tell the 318th to "get the hell off the road." The 318th retorted that it was under XX Corps jurisdiction, then dispatched a cub plane to division headquarters for help. Elements of the French armored division arrived on the scene and compounded the confusion.<sup>28</sup>

The regimental commander of the 318th Infantry finally got a radio message through to the 80th Division headquarters. He informed General McBride that the XV Corps had ordered him off the road, then said: "My mission requires speed. What is decision?"<sup>29</sup> What he did not know was that his mission had become outdated by the rapid development of events. The VII Corps had started to close the gap on the XV Corps left that morning, and General Bradley had decided to halt the XV Corps short of Argentan. The commitment of the XX Corps on the XV Corps left proved unnecessary. Instructed to regroup, the XX Corps at 1300 had ordered the 80th Division to concentrate in the Laval-Evron area.<sup>30</sup> General McBride therefore radioed the 318th—and the 317th Infantry as well—to "halt in place, clear road, bivouac present position for night . . . and await further orders."<sup>31</sup>

This did not quite end the confusion. The regiment went into bivouac, but

<sup>28</sup> 80th Div AAR, Aug; XV Corps Memo, 13 Aug, 80th Div G-3 Jnl File; Interv with McHugh, Stockton's Hosp Intervs, III, GL-93 (235).

<sup>29</sup> Msg, 318th Inf to 80th Div G-3, 1754, 13 Aug (received 1825), 80th Div G-3 Jnl.

<sup>30</sup> XX Corps FO 3, 1300, 13 Aug.

<sup>31</sup> Msgs, McBride to 317th and 318th Inf Regts, 1845, 13 Aug, 80th Div G-3 Jnl.

the area turned out also to be in the path of the 90th Division advance. More argument ensued until the regimental commander wearily chose another bivouac. On the following morning General McBride went forward and personally ordered both regiments back to the Laval-Evron area.<sup>32</sup>

By then the V, XIX, and VII Corps of the First Army were closing firmly to the army group boundary. When they completed their moves, the Allied front resembled an irregular horseshoe virtually encircling the major part of the German forces in Normandy. Allied troops held a line from the Canadian positions at Falaise westward to the British near Flers, then eastward to Argentan, thereby forming the Argentan-Falaise pocket. Yet the Argentan-Falaise gap still existed, and through the fifteen-mile opening the Germans were to try to escape complete encirclement.

#### *The German Decision To Withdraw*

Pulling the German armored divisions out of the Mortain sector to augment *Panzer Group Eberbach* near Argentan left the *Seventh Army* in a drastically weakened condition. Corps strove to maintain more than precarious contact with adjacent units, plugging holes in the line with scanty local reserves from splinter divisions. Despite desperate efforts to hold the line, the "undiminished violence" of the V and XIX U.S. Corps attacks on 12 August forced the *Seventh Army* to continue the withdrawal it had started from Mortain the previous night.

<sup>32</sup> Interv with McHugh, Stockton's Hosp Intervs, Vol. III, GL-93 (235).

Yet since Hitler was still obsessed with the thought of attacking again toward Avranches, Kluge could not order an unequivocal withdrawal eastward to escape the threatening Allied encirclement.<sup>33</sup>

Combat on the *Seventh Army* front assumed the character of delaying action. The units fought only to gain time and avoid annihilation. By their tactics they sought to lure the Allies into time-consuming reconnaissance and deployment for attack, then they retired to the next position, usually during the night. The *Seventh Army* continued to resist in this way, withdrawing rapidly weakening units slowly but steadily through successively shrinking fronts. On 13 August the destruction of telephone wires by bombs and artillery intensified feelings of insecurity, for throughout the day the *Seventh Army* was out of communication with *Panzer Group Eberbach*. For twenty-four hours personnel at the *Seventh Army* headquarters wondered whether they were already cut off and isolated.

*Panzer Group Eberbach* was also drastically reduced in strength by 13 August. The *9th Panzer Division* had only 260 men, 12 tanks, and a few artillery pieces. The *1st SS Panzer Division* had 352 men, 8 self-propelled assault guns, and 14 Mark IV and 7 Mark V tanks. The *2d Panzer Division*, which had had 2,220 men, 5 self-propelled assault guns, and 9 Mark IV and 3 Mark V tanks on 11 September, was considerably diminished two days later.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Principal sources are Hodgson MS R-58, and MS # B-179 (Hausser), MS # B-346 (Blauensteiner), MS # A-918 (Gersdorff), MS # B-807 (Kuntzen), MS # A-922 and MS # B-840 (Eberbach), MS # B-445 (Krueger).

<sup>34</sup> *Mittagmeldung*, 15 Aug., OB WEST KTB, *Anlagen*, p. 1403.

While these were extreme cases, the over-all strength of *Army Group B* had declined markedly during the two months following the Allied invasion. By 14 August the Germans in the west had lost 3,630 officers, more than 151,000 enlisted men, and 3,800 *Osttruppen*—a total of almost 160,000 troops. On the surface, this compared favorably with the Allied battle casualties of approximately 180,000 by that date. The difference, however, was more than offset by the increasing number of Allied units arriving on the Continent and by the constant influx of Allied replacements. For the Germans, only 30,000 men had arrived to replace losses in the west; only 10,000 more were on their way to the front.<sup>35</sup> On the basis of this alone, the German situation was hardly promising. Added to this was the increasing threat of Allied encirclement.

An order from Hitler arrived in the west early on 14 August, and according to him, "The present situation in the rear of the army group is the result of the failure of the first attack on Avranches." Alluding to what seemed to the Germans to be a change in the direction of the XV U.S. Corps thrust from the north to the west, Hitler advised of the "danger that *Panzer Group Eberbach*, which was committed much too far to the north, will again become involved in a sterile frontal fight." What he wanted was an attack in Eberbach's sector, "in the Alençon-Carrouges area," in order to destroy the great part of the

<sup>35</sup> OB WEST KTB *Lagebeurteilung*, 14 Aug., *Anlagen*, p. 1379. The Allied figure has been estimated from the 12th Army Group, G-3 Report 71, 2300, 15 August, and from the British Army of the Rhine, *Notes on the Operations of the 21 Army Group* (Germany, October 1945).

XV U.S. Corps. The 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions and the 21st Panzer Division, he instructed, "can and must be employed for this purpose." This time the reinforced Panzer Group Eberbach had to be committed far enough to the south to strike the deep left flank of the enemy and thus deny him the possibility of launching a counterthrust into the right flank of the panzer group as he had done before. In order to free the three designated panzer divisions for the attack, Hitler admitted that contraction of the salient west of Flers could not be avoided. Yet he warned Kluge that as the front west of Flers was withdrawn to a shorter line, the enemy would bring strong pressure to bear against the south flank between Domfront and Alençon. The speed and the extent of the withdrawal to the shorter line near Flers, therefore, should depend on the amount of Allied pressure. Concerned also by "anticipated landings" on the coast of southern France (actually to take place on the following day), Hitler advised Kluge that "destruction of the enemy near Alençon" was the immediate OB WEST mission and that all further directives from Hitler would depend on the course of the battle there.<sup>36</sup>

If Hitler's order failed to bring comfort, it at least had the virtue of being positive. It authorized further withdrawal, and Kluge ordered the westernmost forces to start a retrograde movement that was to take place in two stages

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Msg, OB WEST to AGp B, 0445, 14 Aug, AGp B Fuehrer Befehle. In a letter to Jodl written five days later, on 19 August, Blumentritt stated that Kluge had been depressed by Hitler's order, which by its detailed instructions seemed to imply a lack of confidence in Kluge's ability to handle the situation. Blumentritt's letter is extracted in OKW/222, 25 Aug.

(two nights) to a shorter line roughly through Flers. Kluge instructed Dietrich to disengage the II SS Panzer Corps, with the 9th SS and 21st Panzer Divisions, in the course of the withdrawal and to transfer those forces to Eberbach. Then, during the evening of 14 August, Kluge departed his Army Group B command post and went forward to see how further compliance with Hitler's order could best be carried out.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, what had seemed like the beginning of stabilization on 13 August had deteriorated by the end of the next day. The "great offensive" the Germans had expected on the Canadian front materialized. On a nine-mile front the Canadians made a breach in the German defenses astride the Caen-Falaise road for a depth of five to six miles. On other parts of the front other penetrations occurred, the "most unpleasant" being the pressure of American forces around Domfront. Ammunition and gasoline shortages were getting more critical by the hour.<sup>38</sup>

As Kluge drove toward Dietrich's Fifth Panzer Army headquarters on the evening of 14 August, he found the roads clogged with traffic and dispirited troops. When he reached Dietrich's command post, he learned firsthand that the depleted divisions of the panzer army were too weak to react effectively to the second Canadian attack toward Falaise. In view of the gravity of the situation on the I SS Panzer Corps front, the 21st Panzer Division had to be diverted to

<sup>37</sup> Telecons, Speidel and Blumentritt, 1110, 14 Aug, and Kluge and Speidel, 2330, 14 Aug, AGp B KTB; Kluge's Order, 1810, 14 Aug, OB WEST KTB, Anlagen, p. 1380.

<sup>38</sup> AGp B Tagesmeldung, 0200, 15 Aug, OB WEST KTB, Anlagen.



SIGNAL CORPS TROOPS in Domfront repair wires cut by the Germans.

Falaise in order to prevent a complete collapse of the German defenses in that critical sector. Word from the southern sector was scarcely better. Having judged it impossible to attack because of a shortage of tanks, gasoline, and ammunition and because of the constant activity of Allied planes over the battlefield, Eberbach had ordered all his troops to "pass to the defensive." The *10th SS Panzer Division* had become involved with hard-pressing American forces who were endangering the *Seventh Army* left flank north of Domfront. Thus, of the three panzer divisions designated by Hitler to reinforce Eberbach, only the *9th SS* for the moment was available.

The prospect was grim. If Dietrich could not hold the Canadians, and if Eberbach could not launch a strong at-

tack in the very near future south of Argentan, the only alternative would be to break out as quickly as possible from the threatened encirclement by moving east and northeast through the Argentan-Falaise gap. Delay could very well mean the loss of all the forces in the pocket.<sup>39</sup>

Kluge left Dietrich's headquarters early on 15 August to confer with Hausser and Eberbach at the village of Nécy. Four hours later Kluge and his small party had vanished from sight and sound. When radio contact could not be re-established, a frantic search to find Kluge ensued.

While the search proceeded, the situation in the pocket worsened. Allied attacks continued, with Falaise, Domfront, and Argentan the critical points of pressure. Astride the Caen-Falaise road, the *12th SS Panzer Division* met the continued Canadian attacks with its last strength, while several miles to the west (near Condé-sur-Noireau) the *21st Panzer Division* had to be committed to seal off a penetration. Near Domfront, as the *Seventh Army* executed the second stage of its withdrawal to Flers, American troops threatened to overrun the thin rear-guard line of resistance. Near Argentan, *Panzer Group Eberbach* lost possession of Ecouché.

In addition to these developments, a new difficulty arose, this one outside the pocket. On the *Army Group B* right, in the *Fifth Panzer Army* sector, an Allied attack launched along the boundary line between the *I SS Panzer* and *LXXXVI Corps* broke through the German defenses, and Allied spearheads

<sup>39</sup> Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 2330, 14 Aug. AGp B KTB; see *Der Westen* (Schramm), pp. 353-58.

reached the Dives River near Mézidon and St. Pierre. An immediate decision was required, and with Kluge still missing Dietrich ordered a withdrawal to positions behind the Dives River.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, there was still no word on Kluge's whereabouts by 1830, when Blumentritt, Kluge's chief of staff at *OB WEST*, was talking to Jodl on the telephone. "The situation west of Argentan," Blumentritt declared, "is worsening by the hour." Implying that withdrawal from the pocket was becoming increasingly necessary, Blumentritt passed on the insistence of Dietrich, Hausser, and Eberbach that "an over-all decision has to be made."

"If such a decision has to be made as a last resort," Jodl replied, "it could only be to attack toward Sées to gain room so that other intentions can be carried out."

"I am duty bound," Blumentritt said, "to point out the state of the armored units." All suffered from a great shortage of gasoline because of the difficulty of transporting supplies westward into the pocket.

Jodl did not see the logic of this thinking. In order to break out of the encircling Allied forces, one had to attack.

"We must speak frankly," Blumentritt said. If Jodl had in mind an attack with all available forces in order to bring out of the pocket—if at all possible—at least part of the forces, this was a sound decision. But if the intention was to carry out some other operation, such was no longer feasible.

Jodl was not convinced.

<sup>40</sup> *Tagesmeldung*, 0230, 16 Aug., and Gause Telecon, 1915, 15 Aug., *AGp B KTB*. Dietrich also discreetly suggested his availability to command the army group if Kluge did not turn up.

"I must emphatically state," Blumentritt said, "that I am in a difficult position as chief of staff when Kluge is not here. I have the most urgent request. As long as Kluge is absent, someone must be appointed by the Fuehrer to take charge. It could only be Hausser, Dietrich, or Eberbach."

Jodl seemed to incline toward Hausser.

"I'll be most grateful," Blumentritt said, "for the quickest possible decision. As far as I am concerned, I am cool as a cucumber. But I must say that the responsible people on the front contemplate the situation as being extremely tense."

Jodl stressed once more the essential prerequisite for any possible action in the future: an attack by Eberbach. "But," he added with a touch of sarcasm, "the only reports we receive are that he is unable to do anything."

Blumentritt overlooked the remark. "If a new commander in the field is appointed by the Fuehrer," he reminded Jodl, "he must be given a clearly stated limited mission without any strings attached." Only then would he be able to estimate reasonably how he could expect to come out of the situation. Otherwise, the Germans would probably lose the best divisions they had. Time was short—"it is five minutes before twelve."<sup>41</sup>

An hour later Hitler placed Hausser in temporary command of the forces under *Army Group B*.<sup>42</sup> Later that night

<sup>41</sup> Telecon, Blumentritt and Jodl, 1830, 15 Aug. *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1420.

<sup>42</sup> Though clearly the impetus for Hausser's appointment came originally from Blumentritt, some individuals on higher military and political echelons apparently connected Kluge's disappearance with the Allied invasion of southern France, which occurred the same day. Since the

Hitler telephoned Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model and Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring for advice on a successor to Kluge should such an appointment become necessary.<sup>43</sup>

Hausser's immediate mission as acting commander of *Army Group B* was to destroy the American forces near Sées "which threaten all three armies with encirclement." To achieve this, he was to attack with *Panzer Group Eberbach* from the west. The *LXXXI Corps*, stretched on a 70-mile front from Gacé to Chartres, was to lend its dubious support from the northeast. The *Fifth Panzer Army* was to stand fast north of Falaise, and the *Seventh Army* was to protect Eberbach's rear.<sup>44</sup>

Before Hitler's order reached Hausser on the evening of 15 August, Kluge turned up. What had caused him to vanish was not in the least mysterious. An Allied plane had strafed his party and knocked out his radio. The presence of Allied aircraft overhead had prevented him from reaching his rendezvous point until late in the day.<sup>45</sup>

Whether Hitler's order could be carried out was a moot point because the

---

Gestapo had uncovered allegations but no proof that Kluge had been involved in the July 20th conspiracy; it seemed to some that Kluge might have been trying to make contact with the Allies to arrange a negotiated peace. A detailed bibliography of the case against Kluge may be found in Hodgson, R-58; see also FitzGibbon, 20 July.

<sup>43</sup> *Der Westen* (Schramm); *OB WEST KTB*, 15 Aug. and *Anlage*, p. 1624.

<sup>44</sup> Msg, *AGp B* to *Fifth Pz* and *Seventh Armies*, 2315, 15 Aug., quoting Hitler Order, *WFSt/Op. Nr. 772887*, 1930, 15 Aug., *AGp B Fuehrer Befehle*.

<sup>45</sup> Zimmerman Telecon, 0450, 16 Aug., repeating radio Msg from *Pz Gp Eberbach*, 2200, 15 Aug., intercepted by *II Fighter Corps*, in *OB WEST KTB*, *Anlage 1444*; *Der Westen* (Schramm), pp. 367-68; *Fifth Pz A KTB Nr. 2*, *Anlagen*; *AGp B KTB*, 15 Aug. and *Op. Befehle*, p. 308.

situation in the southern sector on the evening of 15 August was discouraging. Furthermore, in the west the *Seventh Army* was in the process of withdrawing to a line east of Flers. The *10th SS Panzer Division* was unable to disengage, not only because of its involvement in battle near Domfront but also because it lacked fuel to move anywhere else for offensive commitment. The long *Panzer Group Eberbach* front from Briouze through Rânes and Ecouché to east of Argentan, with the *1st SS*, *2d*, and *116th Panzer Divisions* on line facing south, was being hammered. Though the Rânes, Carrouges, and Ecouché areas seemed to the Allies to be "crawling" with Germans, the fact was that the *LVIII Panzer Corps* was being squeezed and this in turn was endangering the *LXXXIV Corps*.<sup>46</sup> Of the two panzer divisions earmarked for Eberbach's attack, the *2d SS* was in assembly area northeast of Argentan and ready for employment, but the *9th SS*, delayed in its relief by a shortage of gasoline, was still west of the Orne River. Not much could be expected from the *LXXXI Corps*, which held its overextended sector with an equivalent of about two divisions—the newly arrived *331st Division* and a regimental-sized kampfgruppe of the *6th Parachute Division* on the right from Gacé to Verneuil, remnants of the *352d Division* with some security elements attached on the left from Dreux to Chartres. An improvised kampfgruppe under a Captain Wahl covered the twenty-mile gap in the middle—two understrength battalions of the *2d SS Panzer Division* and twenty Panther tanks of

---

<sup>46</sup> For an Allied assessment, see *2d French Armd Div G-3 Rpt, Opns.*

the 9th SS Panzer Division, which had been moving behind the front toward the east before being intercepted by the 33rd Division and put to use by the corps. Despite these discouraging conditions, Jodl, who telephoned shortly before midnight to inquire about Kluge's whereabouts, held the opinion that no matter how bad the situation seemed, it was necessary to attack to the east to broaden the open end of the pocket—"because it is impossible to get two armies out the end of an intestine."<sup>47</sup>

Jodl could not see what was happening in the *Panzer Group Eberbach* sector. The roads were virtually impassable; units were intermingled; movements were frequently made under the muzzles of long-range Allied artillery pieces; tanks were repeatedly immobilized for lack of fuel; ammunition supplies arrived erratically; the troops were hungry and exhausted; communication was almost nonexistent, except by radio. Signs of disintegration appeared in certain formations, and straggler lines picked up many more than the usual number of men. Divisions consisted of "a miserable handful of troops" that "never before fought so miserably."<sup>48</sup> An *Army Group B* staff officer, alluding to the retreat from Moscow in 1812, described the situation on the roads as having "a Napoleonic aspect"; since the army group had no means with which to bring matters under control, could *OB WEST* help?<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Telecon, Jodl and Speidel, 2310, 15 Aug, *AGp B KTB*. See also *Seventh Army Abendmeldung*, 15 Aug, and Addenda, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1415.

<sup>48</sup> MS # B-807 (Kuntzen).

<sup>49</sup> Telecon, 1202, 15 Aug, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1402.

Kluge's reappearance on the evening of 15 August brought hope that a weighty decision would be made. After conferring with Hausser and Eberbach, Kluge returned to Dietrich's command post where telephone communication was better. There he remained during the night and the next day, in touch with Jodl, Blumentritt, and Speidel.

His first act was to send a message to Jodl. At 0200, 16 August, Kluge informed Jodl that in his judgment—and he was supported by the army commanders—all the available armored forces together were insufficient for a large-scale attack to improve the situation in the army group rear. He felt that scanty POL supplies were a "decisive" factor. He was discouraged by the "increasingly critical" south flank. He therefore recommended immediate evacuation of the western salient through the still existing Argentan-Falaise gap. Hesitation in accepting his recommendation, Kluge warned Jodl, would result in "unforeseeable developments."<sup>50</sup>

Kluge then waited for the decision from Hitler on whether or not to withdraw. At 1135, 16 August, he telephoned Generalleutnant Hans Speidel, his chief of staff at *Army Group B*, to be brought up to date on messages received by the headquarters. Not long afterwards he talked on the telephone with Blumentritt, who informed him of the Allied landings in southern France. Blumentritt suggested that Kluge request OKW for a free hand in directing the withdrawal operation out of the

<sup>50</sup> Msg, Kluge to Jodl, signed 0200, 16 Aug, intercepted by *II Fighter Corps* at 1145, 16 Aug, *AGp B Op. Befehle*, pp. 308-09.