

by Hitler's thinking to consider sending a panzer division from the Caen front to Lisieux, not far from the Seine Bay.²²

Before actually dispatching a division toward the Seine Bay, Kluge protested to higher headquarters. He asked General der Artillerie Walter Warlimont, Jodl's assistant, what made Hitler insist on sending mobile troops to Lisieux.

"The expectation that in the next couple of days, because of weather conditions . . .," Warlimont began.

"Oh, the usual reports," Kluge interrupted.

" . . . another landing can be made that will put pressure on the weakly held coastal front," Warlimont concluded.

Well, Kluge said, he felt that the Allies were more dangerous in the area where they already were. "We aren't strong enough there," he said. And since he did not have enough troops to cover adequately his entire area of responsibility, he preferred to take his chances where the Allies had not yet appeared. Thus, as to sending troops to Lisieux, he told Warlimont, "I don't like what you say."

"I'll transmit your opinion to the Fuehrer," Warlimont suggested.

"Never mind," Kluge said hastily. "You don't have to tell him anything more. I just wanted to talk it over with you." Still trying to make it clear to Warlimont that he wasn't pleased by the shift at all, he nevertheless agreed to move the *12th SS Panzer Division* to Lisieux.²³ The weakest division in the

Panzer Group West sector, the *12th SS Panzer Division* had started to move to Lisieux when recalled to meet the threat of Goodwood.

The SS armored division was recalled partly because Eberbach no longer had a strong reserve. Since the night of 15 July, the British had attacked on the 12 Corps front using flame-throwing tanks and artificial moonlight, which was created by pointing searchlights at the overcast sky. The limited objective attacks, designed to mask the main effort to be launched on 18 July, forced the *II SS Panzer Corps* and part of the *XLVII Panzer Corps* to pull back slightly. Not only did the corps have to commit their local reserves, Eberbach had to commit two of his reserve divisions. If the *12th SS Panzer Division* completed the move to Lisieux, Eberbach would have only two divisions left in reserve.²⁴

On the British side, the 8 Corps of the Second British Army, eventually employing three armored divisions, closely followed the air bombardment of 18 July and advanced over three miles in little more than an hour. Tactical surprise and the effect of the bombardment were responsible. Eberbach had not expected Montgomery, who had a reputation for caution, to make a major attack out of the narrow bridgehead he possessed east of the Orne. Even after the attack got under way, Eberbach could not really believe that it was the British main effort. Montgomery had achieved surprise by moving his assault divisions across the Orne only a few hours before the jump-off. With German troops destroyed or dazed by the

²² Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 1645, 16 Jul, *OB WEST KTB Anlagen* 667, 668, and 671.

²³ Telecon, Kluge and Warlimont, 1708, 16 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlage* 669.

²⁴ Hodgson, R-57.

bombardment, the divisions manning defensive positions in the bombed corridor were momentarily paralyzed. Despite valiant efforts to reorganize, they were unable to offer real resistance to the British armored attack.

From about 0900 to noon, the 8 Corps was on the verge of achieving a clean penetration. Only when the British hit the enemy's antitank and *flak* guns on the last defensive line was the advance halted. The heavy antitank screen and the efforts of individual German gun crews and bazooka teams contributed greatly to delaying an immediate exploitation of the potential breakthrough. More important perhaps, the congested battlefield prevented rapid British maneuver, restricted approaches through British mine fields hindered follow-up forces, and subordinate commanders were hesitant to bypass defended villages.

Recovering from the surprise by noon, Eberbach mobilized and committed four tank battalions and four infantry battalions of the *1st SS* and *21st Panzer Divisions* in a counterattack, which dispelled British hope of further immediate penetration.²⁵ Despite Eberbach's ability to block a clean penetration, his counterattack failed to regain the lost ground, primarily because German tanks moving forward to counterattack "sank into a field of craters and had to be pulled out by tractors." With all of Eberbach's forces committed and with the *12th SS Panzer Division*, which had

turned back from Lisieux, hardly sufficient to affect the situation, Kluge requested and received permission to bring the *116th Panzer Division* from the *Fifteenth Army* sector across the Seine River. "We have to get tanks," Kluge insisted. "We have to let higher headquarters know without misunderstanding that we must have more tanks."²⁶

Though the British had lost 270 tanks and 1,500 men on the first day of attack, Goodwood continued on 19 July as the British endeavored to extend their gains by limited local attacks. Resistance continued strong, and the British that day lost 131 tanks and incurred 1,100 casualties. Further attempts to advance on 20 July, at a cost of 68 tanks and 1,000 casualties, resulted in little progress. When a heavy thunderstorm on the afternoon of 20 July turned the countryside into a quagmire, Goodwood came to an end. An ineffective German counterattack on 21 July signaled the close of the operation.

During the four-day attack, 8 Corps had secured thirty-four square miles of ground and the Canadian 2d Corps had captured the remainder of the city of Caen and part of the plain immediately to the southeast. The 8 Corps lost 500 tanks and over 4,000 men; tank losses in the entire operation totaled 36 percent of all British tanks on the Continent. Although territorial gains were small, particularly when compared with losses and with the expenditure of the air bombardment, Montgomery's attack by 20 July had exhausted Eberbach's

²⁵ Hodgson, R-57; Rpt 23, Battle Study Opn Goodwood; Telecon, Kluge and Blumentritt, 2340, 18 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen* 725; B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, the Indirect Approach* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954), p. 316.

²⁶ Telecons, Kluge and Blumentritt, between 2350, 18 Jul, and 0055, 19 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen* 725 and 728.

reserves. Eberbach had to resort to small task forces detached from armored and infantry divisions to operate under the direct control of *Panzer Group West* as "fire-fighting forces."²⁷

At a conference with subordinate commanders on 20 July, Kluge reviewed the battle. There was no recrimination, for the troops had fought well. "We will hold," Kluge promised as he attempted to inspire his subordinate leaders, "and if no miracle weapons can be found to improve our basic situation, then we'll just die like men on the battlefield."²⁸

While the Germans, despite discouragement, were content that they had fought as well as they could, the Allies were far from happy. General Eisenhower had expected a drive across the Orne from Caen and an exploitation toward the Seine Basin and Paris.²⁹ Montgomery had been more cautious in his anticipations. On the afternoon of 18 July, the first day of the attack, General Montgomery had been "very well satisfied" to have caught the enemy off balance. The effect of the air support seemed "decisive." The Second British Army had three armored divisions operating in the open country southeast of Caen, and armored cars and tanks, he thought, were threatening Falaise.³⁰ Two days later, Montgomery judged

that the purpose of the attack had been accomplished. The 8 Corps had advanced nearly six miles and taken 2,000 prisoners, all of Caen had been secured, and the Orne bridgehead had been more than doubled in size. General Montgomery on 20 July instructed General Dempsey to withdraw his armored troops into reserve and replace them with infantry.³¹

To those in the Allied camp who had expected a decisive breakthrough and exploitation, expressions of satisfaction seemed hollow. A profound disappointment swept through the high levels of command. At SHAEF there was much feeling that the 21 Army Group and the Second British Army had not pushed as hard as they might have. "The slowness of the battle, . . . [and] inward but generally unspoken criticism of Monty for being so cautious" brought unusual gloom to General Eisenhower's features. Impatient critics pointed out that Montgomery had gained less than a mile for each ton of high explosives dropped from the planes. Gossips speculated on "who would succeed Monty if sacked."³²

Later, General Montgomery attempted to explain the reason why "a number of misunderstandings" had arisen. He had been concerned on his eastern flank, he stated, only with "a battle for position," a preliminary operation designed to aid the projected American attack, Operation COBRA. Being a major operation, although important only as a

²⁷ Hodgson, R-57; Rpt 23, Battle Study Opn Goodwood; FUSA Sitrep 86, 19 Jul; Brereton, *Diaries*, p. 310.

²⁸ Tempelhoff Conf Min, 21 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*, pp. 169-78; Meyer-Detring Conf Min, 22 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen 1c Anlageband IV*, Annex 25; Rothberg Conf Min, n.d., *Pz Gp W KTB, Anlagen*, Annex 165.

²⁹ See Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, pp. 243ff.

³⁰ Ltr, Montgomery to Eisenhower, 18 Jul, M-60, Pogue Files.

³¹ Rpt 23, Battle Study Opn Goodwood; FUSA Sitreps 85 and 89, 18 and 20 Jul; Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 130-33.

³² Butcher Diary, 19 and 20 Jul; Liddell Hart, *The Tanks*, "The Aims of Operation 'Goodwood.'" The Pogue Files, OCMH, offer abundant evidence of the widespread disappointment and discontent.

preliminary, Operation Goodwood had suggested "wider implications than in fact it had."³³

Apologists could claim that there had been no thought of a breakthrough at the 21 Army Group headquarters, merely hope of a threat toward Falaise to keep the enemy occupied. Critics could claim that Montgomery had tried for a breakthrough with one hand while with the other he had kept the record clear in case he did not succeed. Although General Montgomery had in fact referred in July 1944 to Goodwood and to COBRA as parts of an over-all breakthrough plan, he had also, perhaps inadvertently, or perhaps to insure all-out air support, promised that his eastern flank would "burst into flames" and that he would secure a "decisive" victory there.³⁴ Eisenhower had interpreted Montgomery's intentions for the 8 Corps armored attack as a promise of a plunge into the vitals of the enemy. "I would not be at all surprised," General Eisenhower had written Montgomery, "to see you gaining a victory that will make some of the 'old classics' look like a skirmish between patrols."³⁵ When the British attack failed to achieve a spectacular breakthrough, disappointment was natural.

Disappointment led General Eisenhower to write Montgomery on 21 July to question whether they saw "eye to eye on the big problems." He reiterated

that the Allied needs were the Breton ports; increased space for maneuver, administration, and airfields; and the destruction of German military forces. He remarked that he had been "extremely hopeful and optimistic" that Goodwood, "assisted by tremendous air attack," would have a decisive effect on the battle of Normandy. "That did not come about," he wrote, and as a result, he was "pinning our immediate hopes on Bradley's attack." Nevertheless, because the recent advances near Caen had partially eliminated the necessity for a defensive attitude, and because the Allies had sufficient strength and supplies to support major assaults by both British and American armies, he urged General Montgomery to have Dempsey's army launch an offensive at the same time that COBRA began. Eventually, he reminded Montgomery, the U.S. ground strength would be greater than that of the British, but "while we have equality in size we must go forward shoulder to shoulder, with honors and sacrifices equally shared."³⁶

On that day General Montgomery was instructing General Dempsey to continue operations "intensively" with infantry to make the enemy believe that the Allies were contemplating a major advance toward Falaise and Argentan.³⁷ Referring to these instructions, General Montgomery told the supreme commander that he had no intention of stopping offensive operations on the east flank. Nevertheless, as a result of General Eisenhower's letter, Montgomery gave Dempsey more specific instructions to

³³ Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 127-30; see also Wilmot, *Struggle for Europe*, pp. 353-54, 361-62.

³⁴ Ltrs, Montgomery to Eisenhower and Tedder, 12, 13, 14, and 18 Jul, cited above, n. 18 and n. 30; Liddell Hart, *The Tanks*, "The Aims of Operation 'Goodwood.'"

³⁵ Ltr, Eisenhower to Montgomery, 13 Jul, cited above, n. 18.

³⁶ Ltr, Eisenhower to Montgomery, 21 Jul, Pogue Files.

³⁷ 21 AGp Dir, 21 Jul, M-512, 12th AGp File 371.3, Mil Objectives.

supplement the rather general provisions of his original directive and thereby "fattened up" the attack on the east flank designed to supplement the American effort in the west.³⁸

Reassured, General Eisenhower wrote, "We are apparently in complete agreement in conviction that vigorous and persistent offensive effort should be sustained by both First and Second Ar-

mies."³⁹ But again, as in June when the U.S. First Army had driven toward Cherbourg, and as at the beginning of July when the Americans had commenced their offensive toward the south, the Allies, and particularly General Eisenhower, had their immediate hopes pinned on General Bradley's attack.

³⁸ Ltr, Montgomery to Eisenhower, M-65, 22 Jul, Pogue Files; Butcher Diary, 25 Jul.

³⁹ Ltr, Eisenhower to Montgomery, 23 Jul, Pogue Files.

CHAPTER XI

COBRA Preparations

The perspective within which Operation COBRA was conceived was essentially the same as had bounded General Bradley's July offensive. The objectives remained unchanged: Brittany was the eventual goal, the first step toward it the Coutances–Caumont line.

According to General Montgomery's instructions of the end of June, repeated in July, the First U.S. Army was to pivot on its left at Caumont and make a wide sweep to a north–south line from Caumont to Fougères so that U.S. troops would eventually face east to protect the commitment of General Patton's Third Army into Brittany.¹ To set the First Army wheeling maneuver into motion, General Bradley decided to breach the German defenses with a massive blow by VII Corps on a narrow front in the center of the army zone and to unhinge the German defenses opposing VIII Corps by then making a powerful armored thrust to Coutances. With the basic aim of propelling the American right (west) flank to Coutances, COBRA was to be both a breakthrough attempt and an exploitation to Coutances, a relatively deep objective in the enemy rear—the prelude to a later drive to the southern base of the Cotentin, the threshold of Brittany.²

The word *breakthrough*, frequently used during the planning period, signified a penetration through the depth of the enemy defensive position. The word *breakout* was often employed later somewhat ambiguously or as a literary term to describe the results of COBRA and meant variously leaving the hedgerow country, shaking loose from the Cotentin, acquiring room for mobile warfare—goodbye Normandy, hello Brest.

Reporters writing after the event and impressed with the results stressed the breakout that developed rather than the breakthrough that was planned. Participants tended later to be convinced that the breakout was planned the way it happened because they were proud of the success of the operation, perhaps also because it made a better story. In truth, Operation COBRA in its original concept reflected more than sufficient credit on those who planned, executed, and exploited it into the proportions it eventually assumed. COBRA became the key maneuver from which a large part of the subsequent campaign in Europe developed.

During the twelve days that separated the issuance of the plan and the commencement of COBRA, command and staff personnel discussed in great detail the possible consequences of the attack. “If this thing goes as it should,” General Collins later remembered General Brad-

¹ 21 AGp Dir, M-510, 10 Jul, FUSA File, 21 AGp Dirs.

² First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 96ff.

ley saying, "we ought to be in Avranches in a week."³ Certainly it was reasonable to hope that COBRA would precipitate a breakthrough that might be exploited into what later came to be called the breakout, but a justifiable hope did not prove a firm intention—particularly when considered in relation to the stubborn German defense in the hedgerows. Perhaps in their most secret and wildest dreams American planners had visions of a COBRA that would slither across France, but as late as 18 July there were "still a few things that [First] Army has not decided yet." One of those "few things" was that COBRA was to be synonymous with breakout.⁴

Perhaps the best a priori evidence of how difficult it would be to achieve even a breakthrough was the result of two

³ Interv by author with Gen Collins, 30 Mar 56, Washington, D.C.

⁴ 30th Div G-3 Jnl File, 18 Jul; see also VIII Corps AAR, Jul. The only reference in writing found by the author that expresses the breakout idea before the actual operation got under way is in Brereton, *Diaries*, page 306. General Brereton recorded in his notes, dated 11 July (two days before First Army published the COBRA plan) that he had discussed with General Bradley and three corps commanders the matter of air support for COBRA. He added parenthetically that the COBRA attack was designed to break out of the Cotentin and complete the liberation of France, but he did not state whether this was his idea or General Bradley's. Since portions of the diary were written later than the dates ascribed to the entries, the diary is not a reliable contemporary document.

More suggestive is General Bradley's response to General Montgomery's suggestion that airborne troops be dropped in the Avranches area to aid COBRA. General Bradley said he thought that airborne troops might be more suitably used in future operations, perhaps in Brittany (FUSA Msg, 23 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl). Since General Bradley was not usually receptive to the idea of airborne operations (as evidenced by his behavior later in the campaign), his remark probably has little significance in connection with what he expected from COBRA.

limited objective attacks launched by the VIII Corps a week before COBRA.

Preliminary Operations

A basic feature of the COBRA plan was the encirclement and elimination of the Germans facing the VIII Corps on the Cotentin west coast. For an effective execution of this concept, VIII Corps had to advance its front quickly toward Coutances at the proper time. Yet two German strongpoints in the corps zone of advance threatened to block a speedy getaway by a portion of the corps. To have to destroy them during the COBRA operation would retard the initial momentum of the COBRA attack. To eliminate them before COBRA commenced, to move the corps front closer to a more desirable line of departure, and to get the entire corps out of Cotentin swampland became the objectives of two preliminary operations.

Because the German strongpoints were virtually independent positions, the preliminary operations initiated by the 83d and 90th Divisions of VIII Corps were separate, local attacks. The actions were remarkably alike in the assault problems they posed, in the nature of the combat, which resembled the earlier battle of the hedgerows, and in the results attained.

The 83d Division attacked first. Since its original commitment on 4 July, the division had fought in the Carentan-Périers isthmus, had gained the west bank of the Taute River near the Tribehou causeway, and had sent the 330th Infantry across the Taute to operate with the 9th Division on the east bank. The remainder of the 83d Division had

attacked along the west bank of the Taute toward Périers and had reached a causeway leading to la Varde. In its pre-COBRA assignment, the division was to attack across the la Varde causeway to the east bank of the Taute. In possession of la Varde and near the Lessay-Périers highway, the division would have a water-and-swamp obstacle behind it and be in position to threaten encirclement of Périers from the east. At this point it would also regain control of the 350th Infantry. (*See Map II.*)

The Germans did not hold la Varde in strength. A reinforced company was sufficient since the flat ground around la Varde provided open fields of fire for more than a thousand yards in all directions. Only five machine guns were at la Varde, but they were able to fire as though "shooting across a billiard table."⁵ From nearby positions at Marchésieux, German assault guns could provide effective support.

In contrast to the excellent assistance the terrain furnished the defense, there were no natural features to aid the attack. Between the 83d Division on the west bank and the Germans holding la Varde on the east bank stretched the gray-brown desolation of the Taute River flats. The Taute River, at this point a stream fifteen feet wide and two feet deep with about a foot of soft mud on the bottom, flowed along the western edge of the marsh. The causeway that crossed the swamp was a tarred two-lane road little higher than the open area of stagnant marsh and flooded mudholes. Over a mile long, the causeway ran straight and level through borders of

regularly spaced trees that gave the appearance of a country lane. The road in fact was the approach—the driveway—to a small château on the west bank of the swamp. The small bridge over the Taute near the château had been destroyed by the Germans. Along both edges of the swamp, lush banks of trees and hedges concealed the château, which was the jump-off point, and the hamlet of la Varde, the objective. In between, there was no cover. Foxholes in the flats would quickly fill with water. The only feasible method of attack was to crawl forward and then charge the enemy machine guns with grenades and bayonets. The swamp was mucky, and vehicles could not cross the causeway unless the bridge near the château was repaired.⁶

The division commander, General Macon, decided that an attack launched around 1800 would give engineers five hours before darkness to lay temporary bridging across the stream. Thus, build-up and consolidation of a bridgehead established at la Varde could be accomplished during the night. Colonel York's 331st Infantry was to make the assault, Colonel Crabill's 329th Infantry a diversionary attack. A strong artillery preparation was to include considerable smoke. Though the division tried to get tracked vehicles capable of carrying supplies across the swamp in the event engineers could not repair the bridge over the Taute, their efforts

⁵ Min of Mtg, 1330, 21 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl File. The following account has been taken from the 83d Div AAR, Jul, and G-2, G-3 Jnl and File, 16-19 Jul; 331st Inf AAR, Jul; Sgt. Jack M. Straus, *We Saw It Through*, 331st Combat Team (Munich, Germany: F. Bruckmann K.-G., n.d.), p. 19; FUSA Sitreps 84, 85, and 86, 18 and 19 Jul; VIII Corps G-3 Per Rpt 34, 19 Jul.

⁶ Telecon, Macon and York, 0110, 18 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File.

failed. First Army headquarters, after much prodding, agreed to lend the division eight "Alligators" for one day but refused to furnish drivers.⁷ Normally used on the Normandy invasion beaches to handle supplies unloaded from ships, the Alligators arrived in the division area too late for use in the la Varde attack.

In the afternoon of 17 July, shortly before the main attack, reconnaissance troops of the 330th Infantry, on the east side of the river, attempted to approach la Varde from the east. Enemy machine gun fire stopped the effort. The diversionary attack on the west bank, launched by the 329th Infantry in company strength, turned out to be little more than a demonstration that "just pooped out" after taking thirteen casualties.⁸ At 1830, half an hour after the diversion commenced, Colonel York sent one battalion of his 331st Infantry toward la Varde in the main effort.

Because the causeway was the natural crossing site and because the flat straight road would obviously be swept by German fire, Colonel York sent his assault battalion through the spongy swamp. Using prefabricated footbridges, the infantry struggled across muck and water sometimes neck deep. At nightfall the battalion reached la Varde and established an insecure bridgehead. Many infantrymen who had crawled through the swamp found their weapons clogged with silt and temporarily useless. The mud, the darkness, and enemy fire discouraged weapons cleaning. Though the regiment had planned to reinforce

the battalion during the night over the causeway, engineers had been unable to erect a temporary bridge because of heavy enemy tank destroyer fire on the bridge site. Unable to get supply vehicles, tanks, and artillery over the flats to support the battalion at la Varde, and deeming it impossible either to transport a sufficient supply of ammunition by hand or to send reinforcements across the treacherous swamp, General Macon reluctantly agreed to let the battalion at la Varde—which shortly after daylight, 18 July, reported it was unable to remain on the east bank—fall back.

The 331st Infantry tried again at dawn, 19 July, in an attack keyed to fire support from the 330th Infantry on the east bank of the Taute and to concealment by smoke and an early morning haze. Eschewing the swampy lowlands, the assault battalion advanced directly down the causeway. Against surprisingly light enemy fire, the troops again established a foothold at la Varde. Engineers in the meantime installed a Bailey bridge across the Taute near the château. Unfortunately, a normal precaution of mining the bridge so it could be destroyed in case of counterattack backfired when enemy shellfire detonated the explosives. The bridge went up with a roar. Since tanks again could not cross the swamp, the foothold at la Varde was once more precarious. When the enemy launched a small counterattack that afternoon, the troops retired.

The failure of this attack ended the attempts to take la Varde. The participating rifle companies had taken casualties of 50 percent of authorized strength, and one battalion commander was missing in action. Difficult terrain and plain bad luck had contributed to

⁷ Alligator was the nickname given to an unarmored, tracked landing vehicle, the LVT(1).

⁸ Telecon, Macon and Crabill, 1920, 17 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File.

the failure, but more basic was the ineffectiveness of the 83d Division. The division earlier that month had incurred more casualties and received more replacements in its short combat career than any other U.S. unit in Normandy in a comparable span of time. The loss of trained leaders and men in the combat echelons and their replacement by the large influx of relatively untrained personnel had diminished the division's efficiency. "We have quite a few new men and they are really new," Colonel York explained; "[they] don't know their officers . . . and the officers don't know their men."⁹

Recognizing the condition of the division, Generals Bradley and Middleton saw no purpose in continuing the futile pattern at la Varde. They saw more hope in revising the VIII Corps role in COBRA. In the meantime the 83d Division was to train and try to assimilate its replacements.

In the same way, the results of the 9th Division's attempts to execute a pre-COBRA mission also contributed to a modification of the VIII Corps role in COBRA. After twelve days of sustained action at Mont Castre and Beaucoudray, the 9th Division had also seen its ranks depleted in the wearing battle of the hedgerows. Less than six weeks after commitment in Normandy, the division's enlisted infantry replacements numbered more than 100 percent of authorized strength; infantry officer replacements totaled almost 150 percent. In comparison to the veterans who had fought in the hedgerows, the

replacements were poorly trained and undependable, as soon became obvious in the division's new assignment.

The pre-COBRA objective of the 9th Division was a low hedgerowed mound of earth surrounded by swampland. Athwart the division zone of advance, the island of dry ground held the village of St. Germain-sur-Sèves. Possessing the island and across the Sèves River, the division would be in position not only to threaten Périers but also to get to the Périers-Coutances highway.

Only a weak German battalion held the island, but it had excellent positions dug into the hedgerowed terrain, good observation, and a superb field of fire. Several assault guns and a few light tanks supported the infantry; artillery was tied into the strongpoint defenses.¹⁰

Two miles long and half a mile wide, the island had been more than normally isolated by the heavy rainfall in June, which had deepened the shallow streams along its north and south banks. Linking the hamlet of St. Germain to the "mainland" was a narrow, tarred road from the western tip of the island. The Germans had destroyed a small bridge there, the only suitable site for engineer bridging operations. Several hundred yards away, a muddy country lane gave access to the island from the north, across a ford. How to cross level treeless swamps that offered neither cover nor concealment was the assault problem. Although a night attack seemed appropriate, the division commander, General Landrum, quickly abandoned the idea. With so many newly arrived replacements he dared not risk the prob-

⁹ Telecon, Macon and York, 0110, 18 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File; 83d Div G-3 Per Rpt 22, 18 Jul.

¹⁰ Hodgson, R-54.