

vance, and dashed American hopes for an immediate pursuit.³³

To breach the new line, the subordinate units of the V Corps made detailed attack plans, only to discover as they prepared to launch a co-ordinated offensive on the morning of 31 July that the Germans had disengaged.³⁴ Kluge had authorized the *II Parachute Corps* to withdraw.³⁵ In falling back, the Germans abandoned not only the Torigni road net but also terrain that was highly defensible. Only mines and sporadic harassing artillery fire opposed an uninterrupted advance. American troops cheerfully advanced across undefended ground, while their commanders chafed at the thought of the enemy slipping away undetected.³⁶

Although all concerned pressed for speedy pursuit, the pace of the V Corps advance slowed during the afternoon of 31 July. Nearing the Souloeuvre-Vire water line, the corps encountered pockets of resistance and delaying forces with increasing frequency. The pursuit again threatened to come to a halt.

The boundaries delineating the corps zone of advance met near the town of Vire, fourteen miles southwest of Torigni. If the British on the left and the

XIX Corps on the right advanced as projected, the V Corps would be pinched out near Vire.³⁷ Blocking the approach to the V Corps limit of advance was the east-west Vire-Souloeuvre river line and hill mass, seven miles north of Vire.

These factors generally and a conversation with General Bradley specifically governed General Gerow's desire to cross the hills and the water barriers quickly.³⁸ Earlier on 31 July, Gerow had instructed his division commanders to move only as far as the river line. Later in the afternoon he ordered each division commander to get at least one battalion of each front-line regiment across the river before dark.

On the corps right and in its center, the 35th and 2d Divisions met such strong resistance on the approaches to the water line—and particularly near Tessy-sur-Vire—that it became obvious that they could not comply with instructions.³⁹ On the other hand, the 5th Division on the left met relatively light resistance, indicating that a hard push might gain a bridgehead across the stream.

Unable to reach General Irwin, the 5th Division commander, personally, Gerow phoned one of Irwin's regimental commanders and told him to mount his infantry on tanks. They were to bypass resistance, use only good roads, and get to the water and across it in at least bat-

³³ 35th Div G-3 Per Rpt 22, 31 Jul; Ltr, Brig Gen Ralph W. Zwicker to OCMH, 14 Mar 56, OCMH files. Three members of the 5th Division were awarded the DSC for heroic action that day: 1st Lt. Arthur J. Miller, S. Sgt. Konstanty Gugala, and Pfc. Henry N. Powell, the latter posthumously.

³⁴ 2d Div G-2 Per Rpt and G-3 Jnl, 31 Jul; 35th Div FO 11, 30 Jul, and G-2 Per Rpt, 31 Jul; 5th Div AAR, Jul, and G-2 Per Rpt, 31 Jul; Gerow Msg, 1930, 30 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

³⁵ Telecon, 0030, 31 Jul, AGp B KTB; Msg, AGp B to *II Para Corps* (for information to the *Seventh Army and Panzer Group West*), 31 Jul, AGp B Op. Befehle, p. 206.

³⁶ See the corps and div G-3 Jnls, 31 Jul.

³⁷ V Corps G-3 Situation Map, 2030, 29 Jul.

³⁸ Telecon, Gerow and Irwin, 1710, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

³⁹ 2d Lt. John F. Hermanspan, Jr., of the 35th Division, after withdrawing his platoon from a village, discovered that six wounded men had been abandoned there. Hermanspan re-entered the village and created a diversion to cover the evacuation of the casualties. Fatally wounded, Hermanspan was posthumously awarded the DSC.



TESSY-SUR-VIRE. *Road to Torigni crosses Vire River, left center.*

talion strength. "In short," Gerow commanded, "hurry."⁴⁰ Half an hour later he explained to Irwin, "I told you before to stop at the river—now I want you to change that." The 5th Division was to cover the more than six miles to the river line in record time.⁴¹

Less than an hour after Gerow forwarded these instructions, he learned that a British armored division had attacked to the southwest, entered the V Corps zone, and secured two bridges across the river. "Well now, I don't like British walking across our front [and] taking [our] objectives," General Gerow complained.⁴² But since the British had already secured a bridge-head he saw no reason why the Americans could not use it, specifically the 5th Division, for a quick drive across the remaining seven miles to the town of Vire.⁴³

Unfortunately, the intermingling of British tanks and American infantrymen caused confusion. The opportunity for an immediate exploitation by either the British or the Americans was lost.⁴⁴ One regiment of the 5th Division reached the north bank of the Souleuvre River during the early morning hours of 1 August. There it remained

⁴⁰ Telecon, Gen Gerow and Col Charles W. Yuill, 1645, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁴¹ Telecon, Gerow and Irwin, 1710, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁴² Telecon, Gerow and Irwin, 1750, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File. According to *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, page 150, the British secured permission to move the armored unit on the road net across the 5th Division front. Who gave permission is not stated.

⁴³ V Corps Msg, 1750, 31 Jul, and Telecon, Gerow and Irwin, 1910, 31 Jul, 5th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁴⁴ 5th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1840, 1855, and 2245, 31 Jul.

throughout the day, out of contact much of the time with other division units.

By then, however, after having advanced more than seven miles in six days, the corps had reached the end of what had earlier promised to develop into an unlimited pursuit. On 1 August, as the 35th and 2d Divisions fought near Tessy-sur-Vire to get to the Souleuvre-Vire line, the boundary separating the British and Americans was moved to the west, thereby narrowing the V Corps sector and pinching out the entire 5th Division.

Part of the reason for the boundary change was the success of the British attack south from Caumont. In compliance with Montgomery's endeavor to deny the Germans the pivot point near Mont Pincon, General Dempsey had launched the 8 Corps in Operation BLUECOAT on 30 July. Following a bombardment by 700 heavy bombers and 500 medium and light bombers that dropped 2,200 tons of high explosive, the British attacked a sector that was lightly defended. Only the bombed and inexperienced 326th Infantry Division stood in the way. On the first day of the attack, the 11th British Armoured Division advanced six to eight miles to come abreast of the V Corps east of Torigni-sur-Vire. Operations on 31 July were hampered by the terrain: by the pronounced ridges running across the axis of advance; by the streams, which flowed in all directions and which in many cases were tank obstacles because of their width, depth, or marshy approaches; and by the tortuous roads, which were often banked by high hedges. But these difficulties were quickly overcome when the British dis-

covered that the Forêt l'Evêque, which was astride the boundary between the *Seventh Army* and *Panzer Group West*, had through oversight been left unoccupied by the Germans. A vital stretch of some 1,500 yards of country was theirs for the taking. Thrusting through the forest, the 11th Armoured Division quickly gained the south bank of the Soulouvre River and by 1 August occupied high ground immediately east of the Vire.⁴⁵

A Clash of Spearheads

While the V Corps and the British were driving toward Vire from the north and northeast, XIX Corps was thrusting toward Vire from the northwest. The evidence unearthed by COBRA indicated that the Germans had nothing to stop a XIX Corps advance along the west bank of the Vire, and General Bradley had acted on that premise. Unfortunately, Kluge had not been idle.

As early as the evening of 27 July, Kluge had begun to try to plug the spreading gap between *LXXXIV* and *II Parachute Corps*. He seized upon the *2d Panzer Division*, then under *Panzer Group West* control. The panzer division had been relieved from front-line duty on 22 July by the *326th Infantry Division* (which had come from the Pas-de-Calais), and the armored unit had moved into reserve southwest of Caen. Having had a few days of respite from battle, the *2d Panzer Division* was to move westward and across the Vire

River to launch a counterattack designed to close the gap.

Kluge at first thought of using the *II Parachute Corps* to direct the counterattack, but he quickly decided to insert a new corps between the *II Parachute* and the *LXXXIV*. The *LVIII Panzer Corps* headquarters was moving from the *Fifteenth Army* toward the *Panzer Group West* area, and Kluge considered employing the panzer corps in the *Seventh Army* center to handle the *2d Panzer Division* counterthrust already planned to take place toward Marigny and St. Gilles.⁴⁶ Kluge soon recognized, however, that the situation was changing too rapidly for him to await commitment of the *LVIII Panzer Corps*. Taking the *XLVII Panzer Corps*, which was not only more experienced but also closer to the Cotentin, and replacing it in the *Panzer Group West* front with the incoming *LVIII*, Kluge ordered the *XLVII* to take control of the *2d Panzer Division*. By then the division was moving to an assembly area directly behind the *352d Division* on the west bank of the Vire.⁴⁷

Though Kluge was obviously concerned by the gap in the middle of the *Seventh Army*, he judged the *Panzer Group West* front still to be the more critical sector. The *2d Canadian Corps* had launched an attack south of Caen toward Falaise on 25 July, and, although commitment of the *9th SS Panzer Division* had soon checked the Canadians, continuing activity brought Kluge to that sector again two days later, on 27

⁴⁵ Opn BLUECOAT, pp. 1-2, 47; Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946; see Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, pp. 395-98.

⁴⁶ Telecon, Tempelhoff and Zimmerman, 1910, 26 Jul, AGp B KTB; OB WEST KTB, 26 Jul.

⁴⁷ Telecons, Tempelhoff and Speidel, 1010, 27 Jul, and Kluge and Pemsel, 1700, 27 Jul, AGp B KTB; OB WEST KTB, 27 Jul, and *Anlage 875*.

July. While he was there, Hausser and Choltitz were struggling to maintain a semblance of order in the *LXXXIV Corps* sector. When Kluge returned to his headquarters that evening, he learned that the *LXXXIV Corps* sector was in turmoil. When he discovered, on the following morning, 28 July, that three divisions had to be considered lost in the Cotentin and that the gap was larger than had been earlier reported, Kluge realized that the *2d Panzer Division* would not be enough. He needed more troops west of the Vire.

The *363d Division* was en route to the Normandy front but was not immediately available for commitment. The *9th Panzer Division*, released from the *Nineteenth Army* in southern France, would not be on hand for about ten days. With no alternative but to call upon *Panzer Group West* and thereby weaken the front south of Caen, Kluge took the *116th Panzer Division*, a unit that had recently come from the Pas-de-Calais into *Panzer Group West* reserve. Together, the *2d* and *116th Panzer Divisions*, under the command of the *XLVII Panzer Corps*, were to attack north from Percy to close the gap between *Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly* and the Vire River.⁴⁸

Starting on the night of 27 July, the *2d Panzer Division* crossed the Vire River at Tessy-sur-Vire and assembled near Moyon, three miles northwest of Tessy. On 28 July the *XLVII Panzer Corps* assumed command not only of the *2d Panzer Division* but also of the remnants of the *352d Division* near Beaucoudray and the few remaining

⁴⁸ Telecons, Kluge and Warlimont, 0925, 28 Jul, Kluge and Gause, 1303, 28 Jul, and Kluge and Blumentritt, 1645, 28 Jul, *AGp B KTB*.

units of *Panzer Lehr* near Percy. The *116th Panzer Division*, making a forced daylight march, was expected to be in position to attack northwest from Percy on the following afternoon, 29 July. On 29 July the *XLVII Panzer Corps* also took command of the *2d SS Panzer Division*, deployed between the Siene River and a point east of Percy.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Kluge was satisfied on 28 July that these arrangements were the best that could be made, particularly since Warlimont had promised to request permission from Hitler for the *Seventh Army* to withdraw to the Granville-Gavray-Percy-Tessy-sur-Vire-Caumont line.⁵⁰ Kluge felt reasonably certain that he could re-establish a stable defensive line. The *II Parachute Corps* would remain essentially in place, making minor adjustments to conform to the new defenses but keeping the *Panzer Group West* left flank well covered. The *XLVII Panzer Corps* would plug the gap in the *Seventh Army* center. And the *LXXXIV Corps*, it still seemed at that date, would hold Coutances until strong forces withdrawing south had re-established a firm anchor at Granville for the entire German defenses in Normandy. This was Kluge's hope. But first he had to reckon with the *XIX U.S. Corps*.

General Corlett on 28 July was also displacing troops west of the Vire River. He had hoped to take with him his two experienced divisions, the *35th* and *29th*,

⁴⁹ Telecon, Kluge and his son Guenther, a lt col, 1800, 28 Jul, and Speidel and Pemsel, 1350, 28 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; *AGp B KTB*, 29 Jul, *Darstellung der Ereignisse*; Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, p. 208; MS # P-59 (Stoeckler).

⁵⁰ Telecon, Kluge and Warlimont, 0925, 28 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; *Der Westen* (Schramm).

leaving the untested 28th Division (Maj. Gen. Lloyd D. Brown) on a relatively static front at St. Lô. But the need for the 35th Division to advance south of St. Lô on 27 July to maintain pressure on the withdrawing Germans changed Corlett's plans. The 35th Division attack nevertheless provided an assist by securing an additional bridge over the Vire southeast of St. Lô, thereby facilitating the movement of the 28th and 29th Divisions into the new corps zone.⁵¹

At noon on 28 July, while the displacement was being carried out, General Corlett assumed responsibility for the units already engaged in his new zone—the 30th Division and CCA of the 2d Armored Division, the latter reinforced by the 4th Division's 22d Infantry, plus the 113th Cavalry Group. (*See Map VI.*)

The XIX Corps mission of driving south about twenty miles from le Mesnil-Herman to the town of Vire in what was hoped would be a virtually uncontested pursuit contrasted with the previous aim of the forces already engaged on the west bank of the Vire River. While under VII Corps and engaged in Operation COBRA, the 30th Division and the reinforced CCA of the 2d Armored Division had driven south to wall off the Vire River against possible German attacks launched from the east. By noon, 28 July, they were completing their COBRA assignments. The 30th Division, after securing three Vire River bridges south of St. Lô, was moving against slight resistance toward a natural stopping

⁵¹ FUSA Memo, 23 Jul, and Msg, 0015, 28 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl; 28th and 29th Div AAR's, Jul; XIX Corps Ltrs of Instr, 6, 1130, and 9, 2330, 27 Jul, and G-3 Per Rpt 51, 28 Jul.

place, a stream south of the villages of Moyon and Troisgots, where General Hobbs hoped to "get a little breather."⁵² CCA was in possession of its primary COBRA objective, le Mesnil-Herman, and was probing toward the towns of Villebaudon and Tessy-sur-Vire.

Less concerned with blocking a possible German move across the Vire than with launching a rapid advance to the south, General Corlett believed a quick movement to his objective to be possible. Estimates indicated that the XIX Corps faced fewer than 3,000 German combat effectives—disorganized and battered units supported by only four artillery battalions and scattered batteries of self-propelled guns. Without prepared positions and lacking reserves, the Germans could make a stand at only two places, on high ground south of Tessy-sur-Vire and on commanding terrain near Vire.⁵³

One speck blemished this optimistic view. While reconnoitering in force from le Mesnil-Herman toward Villebaudon and Tessy-sur-Vire on 27 July, task forces of CCA had encountered increasing resistance that denied advance of more than two miles in each direction.⁵⁴ It became apparent that part of the 2d *Panzer Division*, believed moving westward, was already west of the Vire River. Although Allied planes were harassing the enemy's approach, the panzer division was judged capable of getting at least a motorized infantry regiment and about twenty tanks in front of the XIX Corps by the morning of 28 July.⁵⁵

⁵² Telecon, Hobbs, 2210, 27 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁵³ Intel Annex to XIX Corps FO 8, 0300, 28 Jul.

⁵⁴ 2d Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1130, 27 Jul; 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1540, 2100, 2305, 27 Jul.

⁵⁵ Intel Annex to XIX Corps FO 8, 0300, 28 Jul.

So long as this estimate remained only a pessimistic possibility, General Corlett saw no reason why he could not advance beyond Tessy-sur-Vire and block off this excellent crossing site before the *2d Panzer Division* and other German units could offer serious resistance. Thus he designated the high ground south of Tessy—along the Percy–Pontfarcy line—as the initial corps objective. With this potential enemy defensive line neutralized and with the 28th and 29th Divisions in place for the attack, he would drive to the town of Vire.⁵⁶

To seize the Percy–Pontfarcy line, General Corlett directed General Hobbs to take Tessy-sur-Vire with the 30th Division and block the river crossing sites. No doubt recalling the confusion that had occurred in the Taute and Vire bridgehead area when the 30th Division and a different combat command had intermingled, the corps commander halted movement of the 2d Armored Division's CCA toward Tessy-sur-Vire.⁵⁷ Instead, the reinforced CCA was to concentrate on the right of the corps zone and attack south through Villebaudon to Percy. Counting on the mobility of the armored force and on continuing enemy disorganization, Corlett instructed the armored commander, General Rose, to move from Percy eastward to the Vire River. This would serve to encircle Tessy from the west and isolate the town from the south. Then the 29th Division, and later the 28th, would attack to the south.⁵⁸

As events developed, these arrange-

ments were too late, for on 28 July the *2d Panzer Division* was assembling west of the Vire River on a small plateau around Tessy-sur-Vire. The panzer troops gathered behind an east–west tributary of the Vire River—the stream running south of Moyon and Troisgots—and in the area immediately northwest of Tessy for an attack to the northwest. To protect the assembly of the *2d Panzer Division*, Kluge had instructed Hausser to have the *II Parachute Corps*, which still straddled the Vire River, establish a strong defensive line from Moyon eastward through Condé-sur-Vire and Biéville to Caumont, where it was to tie in with the *LVIII Panzer Corps*.⁵⁹ Although the line east of the Vire—from Condé-sur-Vire through Biéville—had successfully delayed the V Corps north of Torigni-sur-Vire, the slashing COBRA attack of the 30th Division and CCA had invalidated positions along that line west of the Vire. CCA had already outflanked the line on the west by reaching Villebaudon on 28 July, and the 30th Division was approaching Troisgots.

The remnants of the *352d Division*, reinforced by elements of the *2d Panzer Division* as they arrived, got set to hold the Moyon–Troisgots line. As troops of the 30th Division descended a naked slope during the afternoon of 28 July and moved toward the stream and a long incline behind it, they came under intense fire. The configuration of the terrain exposed the attackers and gave the defenders defilade. American counterbattery missions seemed to have no effect on enemy fire, and from the

⁵⁶ XIX Corps FO 8, 28 Jul.

⁵⁷ 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1550, 28 Jul; Telecons, Corlett and Hobbs, 1313 and 1937, 28 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

⁵⁸ XIX Corps FO 8, 28 Jul.

⁵⁹ Msg, Kluge to Hausser, 28 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*, p. 195; Telecon, Tempelhoff and Pemsel, 0935, 28 Jul, *AGp B KTB*.

ridge just south of the Moyon-Troisgots stream German machine guns, tanks, self-propelled guns, and artillery denied advance.⁶⁰

Although General Hobbs committed his reserve regiment on the following day, 29 July, the forces failed to move forward. Certain internal difficulties were apparent: the troops were exhausted, a shortage of telephone wire hampered communications, and fighter-bombers in close support inadvertently strafed and bombed several 30th Division units. But the principal reason why the 30th Division did not take Troisgots was the presence of the fresh and strong *2d Panzer Division* defending advantageous terrain. Two co-ordinated attacks against Troisgots—the bastion of the defensive line—by all three regiments of the 30th Division abreast on 30 July and artillery fire exceeding thrice the amount usually expended still failed to propel the division beyond the line of departure. Enemy shells knocked out six of nineteen tanks supporting one regiment.⁶¹

By this time General Corlett had changed the division objective from

Tessy-sur-Vire to Troisgots.⁶² Not only did Tessy seem completely out of reach for the moment, even Troisgots appeared unattainable. The 30th Division was far from getting the "little breather" General Hobbs had hoped for.

For all the indications of failure, the 30th Division to a great extent had prevented the *2d Panzer Division* from launching its own counterattack. Hausser had helped the Americans too. Having become convinced that the *XLVII Panzer Corps* attack had failed even before it got started, Hausser ordered the corps to assume defensive positions along a broad front between the Vire River and Gavray. Kluge countermanded the order at once, but the resulting delay as well as inevitable confusion on the staff levels harmed the offensive purpose.

Some credit for balking the *2d Panzer Division's* offensive intentions also belonged to the *2d Armored Division's* CCA, which had made its weight felt on the right of the 30th Division. By noon of 28 July, when General Corlett assumed control, General Rose's combat command had already secured Villebaudon. An armored column conducting a reconnaissance in force that morning had destroyed six German armored vehicles and a Mark IV tank and had overrun about fifty soldiers to take the village. Another column reconnoitering simultaneously toward Tessy-sur-Vire, in contrast, met strong armored forces obviously belonging to the *2d Panzer Division* and returned to the vicinity of le Mesnil-Herman. Ordered

⁶⁰ [Maj. Franklin Ferriss], Operations of 30th Infantry Division, 24 July-1 August (hereafter cited [Ferriss], Opns of 30th Div), a preliminary MS, Hist Div USFET, 1946, OCMH Files; 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1955, 30 Jul; Telecon, Hobbs and Kelly, 1413, 29 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; 117th Inf S-3 Rpt, 30 Jul.

⁶¹ 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 0540, 0910, 1342, 1347, and 1350, 29 Jul; 30th Sig Co Unit Rpt, 29 Jul; Hewitt, *Story of the 30th Infantry Division*, pp. 43ff. S. Sgt. J. W. Parks, who though wounded took command of a platoon after both the platoon leader and the sergeant became casualties, T. Sgt. Fred D. Steelman, who exercised heroic leadership, and S. Sgt. Frederick W. Unger were awarded the DSC for their actions.

⁶² 30th Div Ltr of Instr, 30 Jul; Overlay to Accompany Verbal FO Issued 1140, 30 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

to discontinue the thrust toward Tessy, directed instead to attack along the axis from le Mesnil-Herman through Villebaudon to Percy, and strengthened by attachment of the 113th Cavalry Group, General Rose immediately reinforced his troops in Villebaudon with the cavalry group and the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.⁶³

Although the route south from le Mesnil-Herman to Percy seemed clear of large German contingents, the arrival of the 2d *Panzer Division* in the Tessy-sur-Vire region threatened the CCA line of communications. The roads leading west from Tessy were excellent for supporting German armored thrusts toward Villebaudon and Percy. To prevent the panzer troops from cutting the north-south le Mesnil-Herman–Villebaudon–Percy road, General Rose tried to erect a barrier along his eastern boundary. He had divided CCA into three task forces, each consisting of a company of the 22d Infantry, a medium tank company of the 66th Armored Regiment, a platoon of light tanks, and supporting units. Since one task force was already in Villebaudon, he sent the other two south and southeast from le Mesnil-Herman toward Moyon, giving them the eventual objective of cutting the east-west Villebaudon–Tessy highway and thereby providing flank protection for the main attack to Percy.

The task force that attacked southeast from le Mesnil-Herman on the afternoon of 28 July drove through le Mesnil-Opac and destroyed five Mark IV tanks and four antitank guns without loss. However, increasingly heavy opposition from

roving tanks, infiltrating infantrymen, antitank and dual-purpose antiaircraft guns, mortars, and artillery forced the column to return to le Mesnil-Herman. The task force attacking to the south reached the village of Moyon but, unable to go farther, also returned to le Mesnil-Herman.

Meanwhile, the Germans threatened to cut the main road between le Mesnil-Herman and Villebaudon and isolate the CCA spearhead. Three enemy tanks actually moved westward from Moyon and seized a crossroads near la Denisière. Reversing one battery to fire north from Villebaudon toward la Denisière at very short range, the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion soon drove the three tanks away. Unable to cut the road physically, the Germans attempted to seal off Villebaudon by interdictory artillery fire along the highway. The shelling of the la Denisière intersection remained heavy, but American ammunition and supply vehicles, forced to speed through the crossroads at irregular intervals, managed for the most part to evade damage.

On 29 July General Rose sent both task forces from le Mesnil-Herman to take the village of Moyon. Though the attempt failed, the CCA task force in Villebaudon moved south to Percy against light resistance. Percy proved untenable. The armored force withdrew to hills north of the town and awaited reinforcement. Threatening to block reinforcement, the Germans again cut the axis of communication behind the advance units near Percy. As enemy artillery interdicted the le Mesnil-Herman–Percy highway and as enemy tanks dueled with American tank destroyers, small German detachments infiltrated

⁶³ The following account is taken largely from [Pillsbury], 2d Armored Div in *Opn COBRA*, pp. 32ff., and from the 2d Armored Div AAR, Jul.

across the route and set up hasty roadblocks.

The arrival of the 29th Division, while not ameliorating the situation at once, gave hope of improvement in the near future. Two of General Gerhardt's regiments—the 116th and 175th—moved into the line near Moyon and Percy to relieve the CCA task forces, which then assembled near le Mesnil-Herman. Directed to advance through Villebaudon and Percy, the third regiment, the 115th Infantry, was stopped by the German roadblocks on the highway. Although General Corlett that evening optimistically ordered an advance to Vire, the corps objective, it was obvious that he first had to eliminate the enemy bridgehead at Tessy-sur-Vire.⁶⁴

To eliminate the bridgehead, General Corlett decided to shorten CCA's planned envelopment of Tessy. Instead of moving eastward from Percy, General Rose was to strike east from Villebaudon. If successful, the combat command might outflank the enemy's Moyon-Troisgots line. The 29th Division would then be able to proceed through Villebaudon and Percy and launch the drive toward Vire.

On the morning of 30 July, a reinforced tank battalion and an infantry company of CCA moved from le Mesnil-Herman through Villebaudon, turned east toward Tessy-sur-Vire, and immediately met firm opposition. A fire fight involving forty American tanks as well as infantry and antitank guns lasted all day. The 2d *Panzer Division* was tied down in the Tessy region, but the 116th *Panzer Division* had appeared on the scene. After being harassed and delayed

by Allied airplanes during its march across the Vire River, the 116th finally jumped off on the morning of 30 July. At once it became bogged down in a struggle for the hills around Percy, Villebaudon, and Beaucoudray. (*See Map VII.*)

For the Americans, the problem of taking Tessy vanished under the more pressing need to hold Villebaudon. While the 28th Division's 109th Infantry remained north of le Mesnil-Herman to constitute the corps reserve, the other two regiments of the division—the 110th and 112th—moved south of le Mesnil-Herman to back up the defense of Villebaudon. The 116th and 175th Regiments of the 29th Division exerted pressure meanwhile against Moyon and Percy, and the 30th Division placed pressure against Troisgots. As a result of this corps-wide effort and of assistance from fighter-bombers that struck Tessy-sur-Vire several times during the day, CCA retained possession of Villebaudon.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the 29th Division's 115th Infantry, which had been blocked south of Villebaudon, finally reached the outskirts of Percy.

The 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion played a significant part in the battle on 30 July. Ordered to move from Villebaudon to Percy that morning, the battalion had formed in a march column with the heads of the battery columns on the main road leading south. Before the move started, news of the counterattack prompted the unit to hold in place and assume firing positions. Although scattered small arms fire struck near the guns for an hour around noon,

⁶⁴ XIX Corps FO 9, 2330, 29 Jul.

⁶⁵ 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1440 and 1539, 30 Jul.