

Bohn had ordered the attacking task force to use the roads in the same sense that Hobbs had meant it, the task force commander had instructed his units to use the "hedgerow method of advance." When Bohn repeated his order and when the task force commander seemed hesitant about carrying it out, Bohn started forward to expedite personally a change in the manner of attack.

Traffic congestion, intensified by intermittent rain, so delayed General Bohn that he did not reach the task force command post until an hour after noon. Reiterating his orders, he told the task force commander to get on the roads and move. In response, the officer demanded with some heat whether General Bohn realized that he was "asking him to go contrary to General Corlett's directives, General Watson's directives, and the rehearsals . . . of the tank-infantry teams." At this point, General Bohn himself took charge of the task force.

While Bohn was attempting to get through the traffic congestion to the task force, General Hobbs was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the slow progress. Unwilling to suffer longer what appeared to him a clear case of inefficiency, Hobbs sent Bohn an ultimatum: either reach the objective, Hauts-Vents, by 1700, or relinquish command.

General Corlett had also become dissatisfied. Learning at 1400 that the leading task force had advanced only 600 yards in eight hours but had lost not a man or a tank to German fire, Corlett had come to the conclusion that Bohn was not pressing the attack with sufficient vigor. He requested

General Walker, who was assisting because of Corlett's illness, to inform Bohn that if Bohn's relief were recommended, he, Corlett, would have to concur. Walker transmitted the message shortly after Hobbs' ultimatum arrived.

Still impatient to know why CCB was not getting underway, General Hobbs sent his assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. William K. Harrison, jr., to find out. General Harrison reached the task force about 1500; an hour later he was satisfied that General Bohn had the situation well in hand.

With the task force commander still muttering that "it was fatal to get on the roads . . . after all the indoctrination by the Division Commander," General Bohn finally succeeded in reorganizing the task force so that it could move in column along parallel routes without the delay of plowing abreast through the fields. Anxious to give higher headquarters some sign of progress, he directed a tank company to proceed without delay and without pause southwest to the objective. The tank company was to disregard communications with the rear, move to the St. Jean-de-Daye-Pont-Hébert highway, cross the highway, and continue on to Hill 91 at Hauts-Vents.

Eight tanks of the company moved ahead down a narrow country lane in single file, spraying the ditches and hedges with machine gun fire as they advanced. They soon vanished from sight.

One reason higher commanders were so insistent upon getting CCB rolling was their knowledge of the approach of substantial enemy forces: from the west a part of the 2d SS *Panzer Division*, an

infantry battalion supported by a tank company; from the east the full power of the *Panzer Lehr Division*. Since early morning intelligence officers had been expressing considerable concern about what appeared to be a strong enemy effort in the making, particularly after aerial reconnaissance confirmed the movement of enemy tanks toward the Taute and Vire sector.¹⁶ General Corlett suggested that a screen of bazookas and antitank guns be thrown up close behind the forward troops, and that all artillery units be alerted for action against enemy armor. A rash of rumors spread through the ranks as everyone became acutely conscious of the probability of counterattack. An incipient cloudiness turning into mist and later into drizzling rain obscured the ground, denied further observation, and thwarted air attack on the enemy columns.

Later in the morning on 9 July, small probing elements of a tank-infantry task force of the *2d SS Panzer Division* struck the 30th Division right flank near le Désert. The threat was contained by noon time, and the 30th Division became satisfied that the anticipated German effort had been stopped. Secure in this belief, the division artillery was displacing its headquarters early that afternoon when enemy infantry, tanks, and self-propelled guns again struck the right flank. For more than an hour, during the critical early stages of the German attack, the division artillery operated from its old command post with limited means of communication. Not until the fire-direction center opened at its new location could un-

qualified co-ordination with XIX Corps be achieved. Despite some uncertainty as to the positions of several U.S. infantry units, eighteen artillery battalions took the Germans under fire. The artillery was chiefly responsible for checking the German thrust.¹⁷ More reassuring was the imminent arrival on that day of the 9th Division, which was to secure the 30th Division right flank.¹⁸

Though beaten back, the counterattack was not without consequences. Pursuing two Mark IV tanks down a country road, a company of the 743d Tank Battalion (attached to the 30th Division) fell into an ambush. German armor with screaming sirens attacked from the flank at close range, and in fifteen minutes the tank company had lost most of its equipment. Three damaged tanks were abandoned; nine tanks and a dozer were destroyed; five men were dead, four wounded, and thirty-six missing. Having lost two tanks to enemy action the previous day, the company now was virtually destroyed.¹⁹

Although the 30th Division's infantry generally held firm, a few overt acts were enough to cause hysteria among some individuals. Occupying positions several hundred yards ahead of the units on its flanks, an infantry company withdrew to improve its lateral liaison and communications. About the same time, a limited withdrawal by a nearby battalion prompted the erroneous report that an entire regiment was surrounded.

¹⁶ See, for example, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, 1140, 9 Jul.

¹⁷ See below, Ch. VII.

¹⁸ 743d Tk Bn Rpts, 5 and 6, 8 and 9 Jul.

This exaggeration was typical of the uncertainty and the rumors of disaster that spread through the bridgehead during the afternoon. News of the destruction of the tank company fed the apprehension and contributed to a panic that touched about 200 soldiers who were performing close support missions. As soldiers streamed toward St. Jean-de-Daye in small, disorganized groups, two medical collecting stations, a cannon company, and an infantry battalion headquarters, becoming convinced that the enemy had made a penetration, also withdrew, but in good order, to the vicinity of St. Jean-de-Daye. On the basis of these withdrawals, front-line units became concerned about the integrity and disposition of adjacent troops. Several headquarters complained that subordinate units of other headquarters were fleeing in disorder.²⁰

At the height of the counterattack, the eight tanks dispatched by General Bohn were proceeding toward the St. Jean-de-Daye-Pont-Hébert highway. Several miles ahead of CCB's leading task force, and angling southwest toward the highway, the tanks were to turn left when they reached the main road. They were then to go several hundred yards south before turning right on a secondary road to the objective, Hauts-Vents. Spraying the hedges and ditches continuously with machine gun fire, the tankers reached the north-south highway. Instead of turning left and south, the company commander in the lead tank turned right and north toward

St. Jean-de-Daye. The other seven tanks in column followed.²¹

In the meantime, just south of the St. Jean-de-Daye crossroads, a company of the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion had emplaced its 3-inch guns along the main highway. Stragglers falling back on the crossroads told the tank-destroyer crewmen of a breakthrough by German armor, which, the stragglers said, was just a short distance over the hill. Air bursts exploding in the vicinity from unidentified guns seemed to substantiate the reports. A short while later the reports took on added credence when one of the 30th Division's regiments passed on the erroneous information that fifty enemy tanks were moving north on the highway from Pont-Hébert toward St. Jean-de-Daye. Manning their guns and outposting them with bazookas, the tank-destroyer crewmen peered anxiously through the drizzling rain of the foggy afternoon and listened for the sound of tank motors.

They were fully alert when the silhouette of a tank hull nosed over the top of a small rise a thousand yards away. Although there was little doubt that this was the enemy, a tank-destroyer officer radioed his company to ask whether any American tanks were in the area. The reply came at once: nearby armor was German. By then several other tanks had come into view. Firing machine guns and throwing an occasional round of high explosive into the adjacent fields, the tanks moved

²⁰ 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1749, 9 Jul; 3d Armd Div CCB S-3 Jnl, entry 1830, 9 Jul; XIX Corps IG Ltr, Rpt of Investigation of Incident . . . , 13 Jul.

²¹ An element of CCA had made a similar mistake at the end of June "because one TF got mixed up on proper use of Slidex and Map Lay." (Penned note, n.d., 3d Armd Div CCB S-3 Jnl and File.) Slidex was a slide-rule type of decoding device.

steadily toward the tank-destroyer positions. There could be no doubt that these were anything but the long-awaited enemy. The tank-destroyer guns opened fire at a range of 600 yards. The first round scored a direct hit on the lead tank.

At this moment General Bohn at the task force command post was trying to get in touch with the tanks he had sent ahead. On the open radio channel he heard a cry of anguish and the voice of the tank-company commander say with awful clarity, "I am in dreadful agony."

Before mutual identification could be established, crews of the tanks and tank destroyers together had sustained about ten casualties. Two tanks were knocked out.²²

Reversing direction, the six remaining tanks began rolling back down the highway toward Hauts-Vents. Again they disappeared, again they lost communication with Bohn's headquarters. Although the tank radios could transmit, they perversely failed in reception.

General Bohn subsequently succeeded in getting the bulk of his leading task force to the St. Jean-de-Daye-Pont-Hébert highway. By evening the task force was advancing toward the objective. The third task force, having moved west and cross-country in the rear, debouched on the main road and rolled rapidly to the south.

Just as it began to appear that CCB might complete its mission that night, General Hobbs ordered a halt. General Bohn was to set up defensive positions astride the Pont-Hébert road

about a mile short of Hauts-Vents. Although Bohn requested permission to continue—on the consideration not only of weak opposition but also that the armor was at last free of the constricting terrain and could reach Hauts-Vents before dark—Hobbs refused.

General Hobbs had based his decision upon the likelihood that the Germans might continue to counterattack after dark. If the combat command took Hauts-Vents, the division would have to advance in a strong supporting effort. Although the division had sustained less than 300 casualties that day, most of them from enemy artillery fire, Hobbs felt that he needed to reorganize before attempting to attack. He judged that strong defensive positions were more important. Without a supporting advance by infantry, he believed that Combat Command B would be too far in advance at Hauts-Vents for adequate flank and rear protection in an area where enemy strength was manifest. He told Bohn to direct his troops to "button up along the line I gave them and get a good night's rest."²³

As the combat command assumed the defensive, General Bohn tried to call back the six tanks that had disappeared. Shortly before darkness, the tankers had reported being on the hill objective at Hauts-Vents. A moment later, an air mission, requested earlier but delayed by the bad weather, struck Hauts-Vents in the fading light. Though American pilots strafed the six tanks, the tanks luckily escaped losses. Unable to receive on their faulty radio sets, and ignorant of the order that had halted

²² 2d TD Gp Ltr, Rpt of Investigation, 11 Jul; 82d TD Bn Rpt 15, 9 Jul.

²³ Telecon, Gen Bohn and Lt Col Harold E. Hassenfelt, 2015, 9 Jul.

the main force of CCB, the tankers formed a perimeter in a field at darkness and awaited the arrival of General Bohn and the rest of the force.²⁴

The news that six tanks of Combat Command B were on the objective was received at headquarters of both the 30th Division and the XIX Corps with some skepticism. After forty-eight hours of disappointment, it was difficult to believe that the armor had finally reached Hauts-Vents. But since the possibility existed and because there was further uncertainty about the precise positions of the rest of the combat command, the corps and the division artillery had difficulty planning and executing their harassing and interdictory fires for the night. This was the final blow of another day of frustration in the attempt to achieve co-ordination between armor and infantry.²⁵

Having warned General Bohn of relief if he did not reach his objective by 1700, General Hobbs removed him from command five hours later. His grounds: the extreme caution that the combat command had displayed in conducting an attack against relatively light opposition. For the lack of aggressiveness throughout the command, he held the senior officer personally responsible. Although Bohn's efforts on the afternoon of 9 July were commendable, he had not secured the co-operation of his subordinate commanders. Even though the limited roads and trails available to the combat command had intensified the problem of regrouping from a

"hedgerow-to-hedgerow" advance to one "down roads and trails," the failure appeared essentially that of command. "I know what you did personally," General Hobbs assured General Bohn, "[but] you're a victim of circumstances."²⁶

Under Col. Dorrance S. Roysdon, CCB resumed the attack toward Hauts-Vents soon after daybreak on the third day, 10 July. The six tank crews, after waiting vainly all night for the combat command to join them on the objective, returned at dawn. Had they remained at Hauts-Vents, they would have facilitated the advance of the main body. As it was, congestion on the sunken roads and enemy antitank fire hampered the command almost at once. A destroyed enemy tank blocked movement until bulldozers, maneuvering tortuously on the narrow road, cleared a bypass. The column continued until the destruction of the lead tank by enemy fire again blocked the way. The roads were so jammed with traffic and movement was so slow that Colonel Roysdon requested permission to use the main highway south to Pont-Hébert instead of the minor country roads leading southwest to Hauts-Vents. General Hobbs denied the request, for he wanted to keep the highway open for the 30th Division to attack south once the armor took Hill 91. After a co-ordination conference attended by General Hobbs, General Watson, Colonel Roysdon, and an infantry regimental commander, the combat command, by midmorning, seemed to be moving ahead. "Whatever confusion we had with the armor is reason-

²⁴ 3d Armd Div CCB S-3 Jnl File, entry 2145, 9 Jul; 30th Div G-3 Jnl, Evening Msgs, 9 Jul.

²⁵ 30th Sig Co Rpt 21, 9 Jul; Telecons, Hobbs and Bohn, 1140, 9 Jul, Hobbs and Ednie, 1910, 9 Jul.

²⁶ XIX Corps IG Rpt of Investigation in the Relief of Brig Gen John J. Bohn, Jul 44.

ably well ironed out," Hobbs reported. "Roysdon is kicking them along."²⁷

The honeymoon was short lived. That afternoon, as the hedgerow terrain and German fire continued to retard the advance, General Hobbs again became discontented. "If Colonel Roysdon doesn't do what he can do, and should have done by noon today," he threatened, "he too would have to be relieved of command. Roysdon's "only trouble" was that he "wasn't doing anything." "Please get them out of our hair," Hobbs begged.²⁸

In the evening General Corlett decided to detach CCB from the 30th Division as soon as Hill 91 at Hauts-Vents was secured. The infantry division alone would continue to the ridge west of St. Lô, the final corps objective.²⁹

By this time, *Panzer Lehr* was moving into the area. Hauts-Vents was no longer undefended and waiting to be occupied. A contingent of CCB did reach the top of Hill 91 on the evening of 10 July, but strong enemy artillery and mortar fire forced withdrawal. Though unsuccessful in seizing and holding the ground, the contingent nevertheless disrupted *Panzer Lehr* preparations for an attack that had been planned to start shortly after midnight.³⁰

Combat Command B jumped off again on the morning of 11 July. Enemy antitank guns east of the Vire River knocked out six tanks immedi-

ately, but the attack continued. Reaching the crest of Hill 91 once more, men and tanks again had to give way. A second assault, led personally by Colonel Roysdon, finally secured Hauts-Vents during the afternoon. The accomplishment caused Roysdon to characterize the morale of his exhausted troops as "amazing"; his words of praise: "Enough cannot be said."³¹

Earlier in the afternoon General Hobbs had refused an offer by General Corlett of an additional tank battalion. He already had three battalions of CCB, he said, "sitting on their fannies." Not until a day later, with Hill 91 in hand, could Hobbs look at the matter differently. He agreed with Roysdon that the combat command had done a good job, and he regretted his relief of General Bohn. "If he [Bohn] had had a little more of a chance," Hobbs admitted, "he probably would have done the same thing [as Roysdon]."³²

The entrance of CCB into the bridgehead had resulted in another frustration similar to those on the other active portions of the First Army front. Five days of combat had advanced the XIX Corps right wing only halfway to the ridge west of St. Lô. Great promise of quick success had turned into failure primarily because of the un-co-ordinated commitment of the combat command into restricted operational space. Whether General Bradley had intended only a reinforced tank battalion to enter the

²⁷ Telecon, Corlett and Hobbs, 1025, 10 Jul.

²⁸ Telecons, Corlett and Hobbs, 1750 and 1935, 10 Jul.

²⁹ XIX Corps Ltr of Instrs, 10 Jul; 3d Armd Div CCB FO 5, 11 Jul.

³⁰ Seventh Army KTB, 10 Jul; *Panzer Lehr* FO, 10 Jul, Pz Lehr Ib KTB; see below, Ch. VII, for the *Panzer Lehr* attack.

³¹ XIX Corps G-3 Per Rpt 35, 12 Jul; 3d Armd Div G-3 Per Rpt 17, 11 Jul, and CCB S-3 Per Rpt, 11 Jul. Capt. George T. Stallings of the 33d Armored Regiment received the DSC for his actions between 8 and 11 July.

³² Telecons, Hobbs and West, 1310, 11 Jul, Hobbs and Corlett, 0830, 12 Jul.

bridgehead on 7 July, as was later claimed, was an academic question by the morning of 8 July.³³ The entire combat command had crossed the Vire and was on the ground, and that fact was unalterable. Little more could be

³³ Interv of Capt Franklin Ferriss with Gen Bohn, 14 Jul 44, in CI 259; Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 27 Jul 44, S-56328, Pogue Files.

done than to hope that the armor would disentangle itself from the congestion and the terrain. An opportunity to make a deep penetration had been missed, for by the time the combat command got free of its external repressions and its internal inhibitions, the Germans had plugged the gap. *Panzer Lehr* was ready to attack.

CHAPTER VII

The Offensive Continued

By the end of the first week in July events on the battlefield of Normandy had modified German policies to some extent. Hitler, who had depended on the Air Force and the Navy to regain for the German ground forces a favorable balance of build-up and mobility, realized that his reliance on Goering and Doenitz had been misplaced. He turned to his minister of production, Albert Speer, for increased industrial output of war matériel. With more heavy tanks and guns in the field, and with new weapons mass manufactured and distributed—jet-propelled planes, for example, and long-distance snorkel submarines—Hitler felt he might yet smash the Allied beachhead. Still hopeful, he counted on the Army in the west to stall for time, denying the Allies maneuver room and major ports, until eventually the new weapons might be brought to bear. Until then, German commanders in the west were to improve their defenses, disengage their armor from the front and replace tanks with infantry, and mount limited objective attacks and night operations to keep the Allies off balance. Planning for offensive warfare was temporarily discontinued.¹

The Battle for Caen

In the first week of July the Allies had command of the air, their ground build-up was proceeding favorably, and enemy reinforcements moving toward the front were being delayed. General Eisenhower nevertheless was highly conscious of the unfulfilled need for greater maneuver room, additional ports and airfield sites, and open country "where our present superiority can be used." Troubled by the "slow and laborious" advance of the First Army in the Cotentin—due, he realized, to terrain and weather conditions as much as to enemy resistance—he was worried more by the shallowness of the British sector, where one of the invasion beaches, a reception point for supplies and personnel coming from England, was still under enemy fire. He questioned whether General Montgomery, in his professed zeal to attract enemy forces to his front and away from the American sector, was making sufficient effort to expand the British part of the beachhead. "We must use all possible energy in a determined effort," General Eisenhower wrote Montgomery, "to prevent a stalemate" and to insure against "fighting a major defensive battle with the slight depth we now have" on the Continent.²

¹ Hitler Ltr, 8 Jul, quoted in *OB WEST* Ltr, 8 Jul, *AGp Ia Fuehrer Befehle*; ONI Fuehrer Conf, 9 Jul; MS # P-069 (Kreipe); *OB WEST KTB*, 10 Jul.

² Eisenhower to Montgomery, 7 Jul, SGS SHAEF File 381, *OVERLORD*, I (a).

"I am, myself, quite happy about the situation," General Montgomery replied. He had maintained Allied initiative, prevented reverses, and set into motion "a very definite plan." Three needs determined Montgomery's operations—the Breton ports, space for maneuver, and destruction of German forces. "Of one thing you can be quite sure," General Montgomery promised; "there will be no stalemate."³

While the Americans were struggling in the Cotentin, the British had mounted another effort against Caen. Because in earlier attempts to take the city the British had been unable to mass sufficient artillery to destroy the strong defenses, the planners discussed the use of heavy bombers to deliver preparatory fire for the ground action. In February and March 1944 heavy bombers had launched attacks at Cassino in Italy to assist ground troops, but without notable success, and during June heavy bombers had rendered occasional close support in France by attacking targets that the chief of the RAF Bomber Command sarcastically termed of "immediate and fleeting importance."⁴ But there had been no large-scale use of heavy bombers in direct support of the ground troops.

Use of bombers in a direct support role hinged upon the answer to two major questions: Was it justifiable to divert heavy bombers from their main strategic role? Could the planes bomb close enough to the forward line to facilitate the ground advance without unduly exposing the troops to the hazards

³ Montgomery to Eisenhower, 8 Jul, SGS SHAEF File 381, OVERLORD I (a).

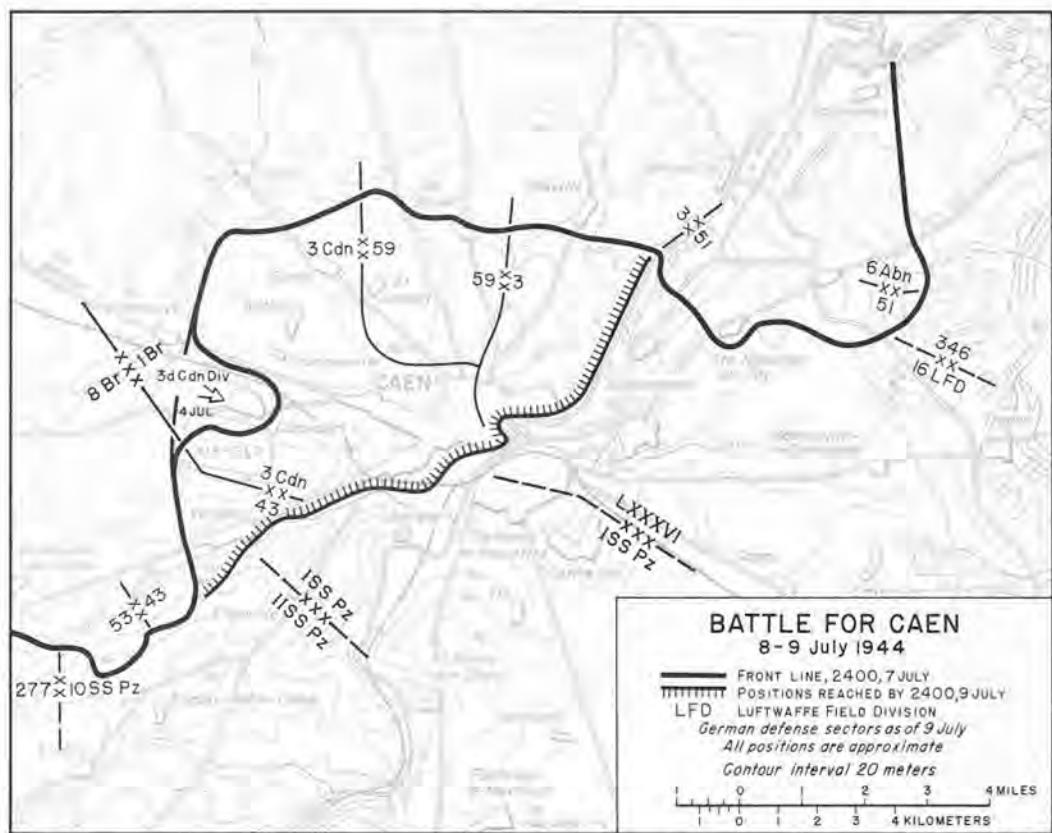
⁴ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 339; Marshal of the RAF, Sir Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947), p. 210.

of accidental bomb spillage and inaccurate aim? General Eisenhower resolved the first question. He favored using strategic air for tactical ends whenever those ends were important and profitable. Caen, he believed, was important and profitable.⁵ Ground and air planning staffs worked out a solution to the second question. A bomb line 6,000 yards (about three and a half miles) ahead of the leading units, they decided, would minimize the danger to friendly ground troops.

For the July attack on Caen, heavy bombers were to saturate a rectangular target, 4,000 by 1,500 yards, on the northern outskirts of the city. The purpose was to destroy both infantry and artillery positions, cut off forward troops from supply, demoralize enemy soldiers in and out of the target zone, and, finally, boost British ground force morale. Field artillery was to cover the gap between the British line and the air target with normal preparation fires. (*Map 6*)

Canadian troops initiated the offensive on 4 July with a preliminary attack designed to secure the western exits of Caen. Three days later, at 2150 on 7 July, 460 planes of the RAF Bomber Command dropped 2,300 tons of high explosive bombs in forty minutes. Six hours later, just before dawn on 8 July, three British and Canadian divisions attacked directly toward the objective with three armored brigades in immediate support and a fourth in reserve. Though the British found many Germans stunned, some units cut off from ammunition and gasoline supplies, and

⁵ Capt Butcher (USNR), Diary, 29 Jun 44, Pogue Files.



MAP 6

one regiment virtually decimated, resistance did not collapse, the fighting was bitter, casualties heavy. Widespread debris and tremendous craters further obstructed a rapid ground advance.⁶

The full force of the air bombardment had struck the 16th *Luftwaffe Field Division*, recently arrived in Normandy from the Pas-de-Calais to replace an armored division in the *Panzer*

Group West line. With one regiment of the 16th destroyed and quickly overrun, Eberbach committed without result the powerful 21st *Panzer Division*, which had just been moved out of the line and into reserve. The attack of the 21st "did not have much point," according to Rommel, "because of the strong enemy artillery fire." The air bombardment had also fallen on the excellent 12th *SS Panzer Division*, still not relieved from front-line defensive duty as had been hoped. Though some strongpoints in this unit's main line of resistance held until burned out by

⁶ Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, pp. 113ff; Stacey, *The Canadian Army*, pp. 187ff; [Robert W. Ackerman], Employment of Strategic Bombers in a Tactical Role, 1941-1951, USAF Hist Study 88 (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, Air University, 1953), p. 86; Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, p. 211.