

the VII Corps toward Coutances, were not yet safe. They still had to reckon with a third thrust by the VII Corps.

COBRA Completed

The 2d Armored Division, commanded by General Brooks, had the mission of erecting a fence around Operation COBRA. With General Rose's CCA driving along the west bank of the Vire River toward the ultimate objective of Tessy-sur-Vire and with the remainder of the division driving southwestward from Canisy toward Bréhal, General Brooks was to set up a series of blocks along the Cérences-Tessy-sur-Vire line.²¹ Although protective by motivation, the armored attack was exploitive by nature. By traversing the comparatively large distances involved, the armored units would arrive in the rear of the German defenses, contribute to enemy disorganization, and shield the VII Corps main effort westward to Coutances.

North of the Périers-St. Lô highway on 26 July and in position for commitment behind General Rose's CCA, CCB (Brig. Gen. Isaac D. White) was prepared to reinforce the CCA attack to the south or the 1st Division drive to Coutances. If neither action proved necessary, CCB was to execute its own planned role in COBRA by following CCA as far as Canisy and then turning to the southwest. With the aim of protecting the COBRA operation against a possible German counterthrust from the south, CCB was to set up blocking positions on the main road between Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly and Lengronne.

²¹ 2d Armd Div FO 3 (Rev 1), 20 Jul, and Annex 3 to FO 3, 18 Jul.

By the evening of 26 July, with the road to Canisy clear of CCA troops and COBRA giving cause for optimism, General Brooks made ready to commit CCB on the morning of 27 July in its originally planned role. Because the road network between the Périers-St. Lô highway and Canisy needed extensive repairs, division engineers worked through the night and during the morning to fill craters, remove wrecked vehicles, and construct bypasses. Shortly before noon, 27 July, CCB crossed the Périers-St. Lô highway. Three hours later, after having ruthlessly barred other units from the roads assigned to him, General White had his leading units through Canisy and headed southwest.²²

At that time General White received a change in mission: "Move at once," General Brooks, the division commander, ordered, "on Cérences and Bréhal." The enemy forces facing the VIII Corps were withdrawing, and CCB was to cut off the withdrawal.²³ Instead of halting at Lengronne, at the Sienne River, in order to leave a coastal corridor for an VIII Corps advance beyond Coutances, CCB was to drive all the way to the Cotentin west coast. General Bradley's original COBRA maneuver had thus been reinstated. The primary concern of CCB was no longer to prevent German reinforcement from the south; the combat command attack had become the main thrust of the VII Corps pincer movement westward.²⁴ Inheriting the

²² 2d Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1735, 26 Jul, 0859 and 1405, 27 Jul, and Msg, 0030, 27 Jul 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

²³ 2d Armd Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1454 and 1600, 27 Jul.

²⁴ Ltr, Collins to Hechler, 13 Nov 45, quoted in Hechler, VII Corps in Opn COBRA, p. 188.

mission earlier held by the 1st Division, General White was to speed his troops to the coast to intercept and trap the Germans withdrawing toward the south. The altered mission involved no change in route but rather an extension of the drive as originally planned. Speed became even more important. The combat command was to race an opponent who had a head start.

CCB was divided into two columns, but the absence of parallel roads made it necessary to advance the columns alternately.²⁵ The 82d Reconnaissance Battalion in the meantime sped forward ahead of the main body. Two miles southwest of Canisy, at Quibou, the reconnaissance troops struck an enemy roadblock. While they engaged the German force, the advance guard outflanked the resistance. A battery of the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, traveling with the advance guard, took firing positions on the side of the road and opened fire on self-propelled guns and mortar emplacements half a mile distant. A flight of dive bombers performing armed-column cover struck an enemy-held ridge nearby. Before this smooth-working team, the German defense disintegrated.

Once more on the highway, reconnaissance troops raced through the hamlet of Dangy, unaware that Bayerlein, the division commander of *Panzer Lehr*, was conducting a staff meeting in one of the houses. Overrunning isolated opposition, the fast-moving reconnaissance battalion quickly covered the four miles to Pont-Brocard, a village where the

highway crossed the Soulle River. Antitank and small arms fire from the village halted progress briefly, but the advance guard soon arrived, deployed, attacked, and seized Pont-Brocard. The advance continued.

Two hours after midnight, 27 July, the combat command without difficulty secured Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly, a village seven miles southwest of Canisy.

This swift advance during the afternoon and evening of 27 July illustrated more than anything else the penetration achieved by COBRA. There was nothing between the *LXXXIV* and *II Parachute Corps* to stop the American forces rolling through the Marigny-St. Gilles gap. Positions at Quibou had proved ineffective and illusory. Soon after American tanks at Dangy unknowingly passed within a few yards of a joint command post of the *275th Division* and *Panzer Lehr*, a shocked Bayerlein reported *Panzer Lehr* "finally annihilated." Units of the *275th Division* had been out of contact with headquarters during the entire afternoon and by evening were considered lost. Remnants of the *Lehr* and *275th Divisions* retired toward Pont-Brocard and Hambye, carrying with them miscellaneous troops in the area. Realizing the extent of the defeat, Bayerlein placed the blame on higher headquarters. "All calls for help have been ignored," he complained, "because no one [on the upper echelons] believed in the seriousness of the situation."²⁶ This was hindsight, of course, but the serious situation was about to become worse.

²⁵ The following account is based on [Pillsbury], 2d Armored Div in Opn COBRA, pp. 47-66; Hechler, VII Corps in Opn COBRA, pp. 187-216; 2d Arm'd Div AAR, Jul.

²⁶ Bayerlein's Est of the Situation, 2215, 27 Jul, AGP B Op. Befehle; see also Liddell Hart, *The Rommel Papers*, p. 490, and MS # A-973 (Schmidt).

In place at Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly to begin its final drive to the Cotentin west coast, CCB of the 2d Armored Division received word of another change in mission. To prevent overextension, CCB, instead of pushing all the way to the coast, was to move only as far as Lengronne and set up blocking positions between that village and Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly. (*See Map VI.*)

To carry out his blocking mission, General White sought to seize the critical traffic control points that lay southwest of Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly and also the bridges across the Sienne River, which bounded his zone of operations on the south and on the west. All the important bridges across the Sienne were to have been destroyed by air bombardment before COBRA, but some had survived intact. To make certain that none provided escape exits for German units, General White planned to outpost those west of Hambye and prepare them for demolition.

Darting through surprised Germans manning hasty defensive positions, streaking past enemy antitank guns at 50 miles an hour, CCB reconnaissance troops on 28 July secured more than the required number of bridges. With the exception of one at Gavray, held by a strong German force that defied the troopers, detachments took the Sienne bridges on the south and outposted the three bridges north of Cérences. Dispersing the reconnaissance battalion to the limits of the combat command sector and beyond was a feat of daring in the best cavalry tradition.

Though the rapid thrust had revealed the absence of serious German opposition and had brought confusion and

hopelessness to the few Germans encountered, General White still could not be sure whether he had arrived too late to spring the trap. Concerned not only with blocking the bridges but also with obstructing the important crossroads, he sent one of his main columns southwest from Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly. The troops mopped up isolated pockets of resistance—hastily assembled elements of the 353d Division that occupied blocking positions between Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly and St. Denis-le-Gast—and detached small task forces to guard the significant road intersections. A reconnaissance troop outposted the final combat command objective, the Lengronne crossroads. A small task force (a company each of tanks and infantry, reinforced by engineers, medical personnel, and a tactical air control party) guarding the right flank was unable to halt several German tanks that crossed the front and moved south toward St. Denis-le-Gast and eventual escape, but it cut the Coutances–Gavray highway near Cambry, set up defensive positions, and waited for other German troops to appear.

Germans had already put in an appearance early that morning of 28 July near Pont-Brocard. On the right of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, which had organized positions at Montpinchon and Cerisy-la-Salle, the regiment controlled by the 5th Parachute Division was to have anchored the right (south) flank of the north–south line established by Choltitz to mask his withdrawal on the Cotentin west coast. The parachute regiment was nowhere in sight. In its place, a Panther battalion of the 2d SS Panzer Division under the control of Panzer Lehr officers, small units of the

275th Division, and assorted stragglers found themselves trying to re-form a front at Pont-Brocard, where Americans had passed the previous evening.²⁷ Early on 28 July some of these German troops overran part of the 183d Field Artillery Battalion, a VII Corps Artillery unit supporting the 2d Armored Division from positions near Pont-Brocard. Fortunately, the Division Reserve (Col. Sidney R. Hinds) was on the road from Canisy, and it quickly restored American control in the Pont-Brocard–Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly area.

This and other evidence made it apparent on 28 July that a large German force was bottled up near Montpinchon and Roncey. CCB gradually turned its major attention to the north and northwest to contain it. The combat command, then, had not, after all, arrived too late.

On the German side, confusion in the LXXXIV Corps coastal sector on 28 July was appalling. Communications were virtually nonexistent. The corps headquarters had some contact with some divisions but could not exercise effective control. The regiment of the 2d SS Panzer Division that was covering the withdrawal of the 91st Division had no knowledge of how the withdrawal was proceeding, and the 91st had no information about its covering force. Some withdrawing troops found to their discomfort that the Americans that had crossed the Soule River at Pont-Brocard were already behind them. Hausser was fired on by an American armored car near Gavray. Tychsen, the commander of the 2d SS Panzer Division,

was killed close to his command post by an American patrol.²⁸

Late in the afternoon of 28 July, when communications between the LXXXIV Corps and the 2d SS Panzer Division ceased, Col. Friedrich von Criegern, the corps chief of staff, went forward to make personal contact with the division. He found that Lt. Col. Otto Baum, the commander of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, had also assumed command of the 2d SS Panzer Division upon Tychsen's death. Baum and Criegern together concluded that American troops had probably already reached the Cotentin west coast and had thereby encircled the German forces still in the Coutances region. They agreed that an immediate withdrawal to the south was in order. They planned to gather all the troops they could find into an all-around defensive cordon, then make a strong attack southward to reach the ground below the Bréhal–Hambye road. While Baum busied himself with the preparations for this course of action, Criegern rushed back to inform Choltitz.²⁹

Choltitz had just received an order from Hausser to break out of the Coutances region by attacking not to the south toward Bréhal but to the southeast toward Percy. Hausser wanted to get those forces that broke out of the American encirclement to join troops that Kluge was assembling east of the Vire River for a counterattack west of the

²⁸ Telecons, Pemsel and Tempelhoff, 0845, 28 Jul, Helmdach and Tempelhoff, 1555, 28 Jul, and Hoehne and Zimmerman, 1030, 28 Jul, in *AGp B KTB*; MS # A-984 (Mahlmann); MS # B-839 (Heydte); MS # P-195 (Wisliceny).

²⁹ Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, p. 209; 17th SS Engr Bn *KTB*, 28 Jul; MS # P-159 (Stueckler); Sitrep, 29 Jul, in *AGp B Tagesmeldungen*.

²⁷ MS # A-984 (Mahlmann).

Vire to seal off the COBRA penetration. A good meeting point for the two forces moving toward each other, Hausser figured, would be Percy. Choltitz protested that an attack southeast from Coutances would leave only weak forces to anchor the entire Normandy front on the Cotentin west coast. But Hausser insisted, and Choltitz complied. He transmitted the order forward—the troops that were virtually encircled south of Coutances were to attack to the southeast, and not to withdraw to the south.³⁰

Hausser of course notified Kluge of the instructions he had issued through Choltitz, and when Kluge learned that Hausser had virtually stripped his coastal positions and thereby jeopardized the entire Normandy defenses by inviting American encirclement of the German left flank, he nearly became violent. He told Hausser to send an officer courier to Choltitz at once to cancel the order for the southeastward attack to Percy. Instead, Choltitz was to mount a holding attack to enable the main *LXXXIV Corps* body to escape south along the coast. The withdrawal was to be made under the protection of outposts that were to hold positions along the north-south railroad between Coutances and Cérences. Meanwhile, a counterattack, to be launched now by two fresh panzer divisions, would strike westward across the Vire toward Percy to act as a diversion for the withdrawal. Once south of Cérences, the *LXXXIV Corps* was to occupy a new ten-mile-long main line of resistance from Bréhal through St. Denis-le-Gast to Gavray.³¹

Kluge's instructions did not reach the *LXXXIV Corps* units. Unable to phone Choltitz, Hausser transmitted a message to the corps rear command post. There, the corps quartermaster took a bicycle and rode forward to give the message to Choltitz. He arrived about midnight of 28 July. Without communications to subordinate units and therefore lacking control of their operations, Choltitz did nothing. Satisfied that the units under the control of the *91st Division* were withdrawing south along the coast, he allowed the rest of the situation to develop as it would. The corps headquarters moved to the south and escaped intact. Meanwhile, the other units along the coast prepared to attack southeast in compliance with Hausser's original order. The effect would be to storm the blocking positions that the 2d Armored Division had stretched across the Cotentin.

The American commanders, Generals Brooks and White, guessing that the Germans would try to break out during the night of 28 July, called in their dispersed and exposed detachments late in the afternoon. Reinforced by the Division Reserve and by an infantry battalion of the 4th Division that came into Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly that evening, the armored troops took strong defensive positions along a seven-mile line between Pont-Brocard and St. Denis-le-Gast, alert to the possibility that the Germans might try to break out from the Montpinchon-Roncey area to safety.

Meanwhile, Hausser's original order transmitted by Choltitz had brought dis-

³⁰ Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, p. 208; see MS # B-179 (Hausser).

³¹ Telecons, Kluge and Hausser, 2000 and 2130, 28 Jul, and Pemsel and Tempelhoff, 2000, 28 Jul,

AGp B KTB; see MS # B-179 (Hausser) for a candid account of the command confusion and the conflicting orders.

may to Baum. Baum had been proceeding on the assumption (made by him and Criegern) that he could easily get the two divisions under his control—the *2d SS Panzer* and the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier*—to safety by way of a southern exit. He had become even more confident when he learned that the *2d Armored Division* had pulled in its troops to St. Denis-le-Gast, thereby leaving open a ten-mile-wide corridor between that village and the coast. Furthermore, Baum had already pulled his units back from the eastern edge of the pocket, and he no longer had a firm hold on the area northwest of Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly. Without that sector as an assembly area, he could not launch an attack to the southeast through Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly to Percy. Baum compromised. He withdrew southward across the Sienne River, then turned eastward to Percy and thereby achieved the desired result by different means.

The other German troops north of Cérences that were covering the *LXXXIV Corps* withdrawal drifted south in the meantime and gathered near Roncey to attempt to break out to the southeast. The main components of this force that could be identified included parts of the *2d SS Panzer Division* and the *17th SS Engineer Battalion*, most of the *6th Parachute Regiment*, and what remained of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*. By striking toward Hambye and Percy, these and other troops were to demonstrate that the defensive efforts on the part of the *2d Armored Division* had not been wasted.

Shortly before dawn, 29 July, about thirty enemy tanks and vehicles, led by an 88-mm. self-propelled gun, ap-

proached a crossroads about three miles southwest of Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly, where a company of armored infantry and a company of tanks were deployed. German infantrymen crawled along the ditches on both sides of the road as half a dozen enemy tanks and armored vehicles assaulted frontally to force open an escape route. The self-propelled gun in the lead overran the American defensive line and was about to make a breakthrough when rifle shots killed the driver and gunner. With the gun carriage blocking the road, individual American and German soldiers battled for the crossroads until daybreak, when the Germans withdrew, leaving 17 dead and 150 wounded. The motor of the undamaged self-propelled gun carriage was still running, the gun still loaded. The Americans sustained less than 50 casualties and lost a tank and a half-track.³²

About the same time, not far away, about fifteen German tanks and several hundred troops overran an outpost manned by a company of the recently arrived battalion of the *4th Division*. The American company commander was killed at once and the infantrymen fell back half a mile into the positions of the *78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion*. Two artillery batteries in direct fire, a third in indirect fire, and four guns of the *702d Tank Destroyer Battalion* held off the Germans for thirty minutes until nearby armored infantrymen arrived to re-establish the outpost line. They found seven destroyed Mark IV tanks and counted more than 125 enemy dead. Some Germans had

³² S. Sgt. James J. Cermak of the *41st Armored Infantry Regiment* was awarded the DSC for heroism.



WRECKED GERMAN ARMOR BULLDOZED OFF A ROAD NEAR RONCEY

escaped in these two actions. Others escaped by filtering through American lines in small groups. In general, however, the CCB cordon proved effective. Troops all along the line had collected enemy stragglers and demoralized remnants of small German units.

Quite certain that Allied fighter-bombers would prevent a German escape in strength during daylight, General White again pushed his defensive line to Lengronne on the morning of 29 July. He re-established the roadblocks at intersections and sent outposts to the Sienne River bridges. General Brooks moved the Division Reserve to St. Denis-le-Gast to keep an eye on German movements south of the Sienne River. Though the

Germans maintained their control over the bridge at Gavray, elsewhere only small enemy groups offered half-hearted resistance.

German hopes for an eventual concerted breakout attempt were largely destroyed on 29 July by Allied tactical aircraft. The destruction that occurred went far beyond Allied anticipation. On the afternoon of 29 July pilots of the IX Tactical Air Command discovered a "fighter-bomber's paradise" in the Roncey area—a mass of German traffic, stationary, bumper to bumper, and "triple banked." Pilots estimated at least 500 vehicles jammed around Roncey, and for six hours that afternoon the planes attacked what became known as

the Roncey pocket. As squadrons of fighter-bombers rotated over the target, American artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers pumped shells into the mélange. More than 100 tanks and over 250 vehicles were later found in various stages of wreckage, other vehicles had been abandoned intact. Though American intelligence officers guessed that a fuel shortage had caused the Germans to abandon their equipment, the fact was that the Germans had fled on foot in the hope of escaping the devastating fire rained down upon them.³³

By the evening of 29 July, the 2d Armored Division (less CCA) was the only unit still actively engaged in Operation COBRA. General Bradley had initiated a new attack but the mission of eradicating the isolated German forces trapped in the Cotentin remained with General Brooks. His method was to erect a cage and let the Germans beat against the bars. The armored division was to hold its defensive lines and destroy the survivors of the Roncey disaster who surely would again attempt to escape during the night of 29 July.

As expected, German groups struck the armored defensive line at various points during the night. Some fought desperately to break through, others battled half-heartedly, still others surrendered after a cursory exploration that satisfied the requirements of honor. In the last category belonged the 150 Germans who stumbled into the bivouac area of the 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion near Lengronne and gave themselves up after a short engagement.

At least two skirmishes reached the proportion of minor battles. The first occurred shortly before midnight, 29 July. As German forces launched a demonstration and a diversionary attack from the vicinity of Gavray with rockets and flares and with a small infantry-tank task force that engaged American outposts near St. Denis-le-Gast, two columns descended from the Roncey pocket and smashed against St. Denis-le-Gast from the north. About a thousand men and nearly a hundred armored vehicles in a well-organized attack penetrated the American line. A Mark V poked its gun through a hedgerow, destroyed the command half-track of a U.S. tank battalion, and set vehicles at the command post ablaze. Disorganized, the Americans fell back, relinquishing St. Denis-le-Gast. Had the Germans been interested in exploiting their success, they might have thoroughly disrupted the defensive cordon. Instead, they wanted only to flee south. Once the spearhead had pierced the American lines, it was every man for himself. The U.S. troops rallied, and an intense, confused battle took place at close range.³⁴ In the morning the Americans again had a firm hold on St. Denis-le-Gast and its road intersection. They had killed 130 Germans, wounded 124, taken over 500 prisoners, and destroyed at least 25 vehicles, of which 7 were tanks. American losses were almost 100 men and 12 vehicles.

Eleven vehicles of the German force

³³ *AAF III*, 242; VII Corps AAR, Jul; First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 107; FUSA G-2 Per Rpt 50, 30 Jul.

³⁴ Lt. Col. Wilson D. Coleman of the 41st Armored Infantry, who was killed while rallying his troops, and S. Sgt. William B. Kolosky of the Division Reserve headquarters, who organized and led a group of heterogeneous headquarters personnel in a defensive position, were awarded the DSC.

that had attacked St. Denis-le-Gast got through the village, but instead of driving south they moved westward toward Lengronne, toward the bivouac of the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Earlier that night U.S. artillerymen manning guard posts around their howitzers had killed or captured individual soldiers and small groups of men, but the small German column entered the American lines undetected. Moving rapidly, the column passed an antitank gun guarding the road. Perhaps the sentries assumed that the vehicles were American, perhaps they were too startled to open fire. Well inside the artillery bivouac area, an American officer stopped the column and challenged the driver of the lead truck. "*Was ist?*" came the surprised and surprising reply. Mutual astonishment quickly vanished and the battle commenced. Machine guns chattered. Howitzers at point-blank range, some from distances of less than a hundred yards, opened fire. A tank destroyer crew at the side of the road making emergency motor repairs began to fire 3-inch shells into the rear of the German column. With the leading and rear vehicles of the column destroyed, the Germans tried to flee on foot. Silhouetted by the flames of burning vehicles, they made excellent targets for the small arms of the artillerymen. The battle was short. In the morning, the artillerymen counted 90 enemy dead, over 200 prisoners, and all 11 vehicles destroyed. The Americans had lost 5 killed and 6 wounded.³⁵

³⁵ Among those killed was Capt. Naubert O. Simard, Jr., who manned an exposed machine gun though he knew that to do so was certain death. Captain Simard was posthumously awarded the DSC.

At the same time the small task force that had established an outpost on the Coutances-Gavray road near Cambry finally saw action after two days of patient waiting. Shortly after midnight, 29 July, about 2,500 Germans made an organized break for safety. The point of the German attack overran a tank roadblock and threatened to crush the entire outpost force. Sgt. Hulon B. Whittington, of the 41st Armored Infantry, jumped on an American tank, shouted through the turret to direct its crew, and maneuvered it through enemy bullets to a place where its point-blank fire destroyed the momentum of the German attack.³⁶

Its attack stalled, the German force fell apart. Some panic-stricken Germans fled or surrendered, others battled at close range near burning vehicles. U.S. artillery battalions gave excellent supporting fires without prior registration and without clearance from the division artillery. As a result of the six-hour engagement, 450 Germans were killed, 1,000 taken prisoner, and about 100 vehicles of all types destroyed. American losses were about 50 killed and 60 wounded.

As day broke on 30 July, hundreds of destroyed vehicles and wagons, innumerable dead horses, and the miscellaneous wreckage of defeat lay scattered over the countryside, grim testimony to the extent of the debacle that the Germans had suffered in the Cotentin. The 2d Armored Division alone had killed an estimated 1,500 enemy and captured about 4,000, while losing not quite 100 dead and less than 300 wounded. CCB,

³⁶ Sgt. Whittington received the Medal of Honor.

General Collins felt, had done "a magnificent job."³⁷

The fact that the action was over by 30 July became apparent as reconnaissance troops combing the region rounded up 250 prisoners and killed nearly 100 other Germans still trying to escape. Shortly before noon, a group of 100 enemy soldiers walked into a command post of the armored division and surrendered.

Thus ended Operation COBRA on the Cotentin west coast in a final action not unlike the last twitch of a lifeless snake. Even as COBRA was expiring, the battle was passing beyond the limits contemplated for the action. With the Germans reduced to impotence, the offensive was becoming quite different from the original conception.

Despite German losses in the Cotentin, a rather large force escaped in the confusion. Among the units that fought or fled to safety were a battalion of Mark IV tanks of the *2d SS Panzer Division*, and sizable contingents of the *17th SS Engineer Battalion*, the *6th Parachute Regiment*, and the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*. Many individual soldiers had also reached refuge. Quite a few who had abandoned their vehicles in the congested mass of traffic around Roncey and left them to Allied air force bombardment organized themselves into haphazard command groups, some effective, some not, and made their way south. Though a sufficient number of troops gathered to man a line from

Percy westward to the sea, the difficulty was that the men were exhausted. As they attempted to establish a defense they fumbled about in various stages of wakefulness. One unit commander, von der Heydte, brought his *6th Parachute Regiment* into a concealed bivouac and there, hidden from Americans and Germans alike, permitted his men to sleep for twenty-four hours before reporting his location to higher headquarters.³⁸

From Gavray west to the sea the front was held largely by remnants gathered under the banner of the *91st Division*. Although these forces had had a relatively easy time in withdrawing south along the coast, they had nevertheless been bombed and strafed and had lost troops, equipment, and supplies. Unable to form a continuous, strong, or stable line of defense, they were destined to be overrun in the midafternoon of 30 July.

Learning that little existed to oppose an American sweep down the Cotentin west coast, the German naval coast artillery battery in Granville destroyed its guns and retreated toward Avranches. By nightfall, 30 July, headquarters of the *LXXXIV Corps* and the advance command post of the *Seventh Army* were behind American lines. The only contact that *Army Group B* had with the combat troops along the Cotentin west coast was that maintained by the crew of a telephone relay station in Avranches, at the base of the Cotentin. Just before dark on 30 July, the signal crew reported the approach of U.S. troops.³⁹

³⁷ Ltr, Collins to Hechler, quoted in Hechler, VII Corps in Opn COBRA, p. 216; [Pillsbury], 2d Armored Div in Opn COBRA, p. 85; VII Corps AAR, Jul.

³⁸ MS # P-159 (Heydte).

³⁹ AGp B KTB, 30 Jul.