



SHELLED CHURCH IN SAINTENY, *World War I* memorial in foreground.

ward in relief. In vain the 83d Division strove to plow the few miles to the projected crossing site.

During twelve days, the 83d Division had sustained a staggering total of 5,000 casualties. Indeed, had it not been for progressive integration of replacements as the fighting developed, the division would have been little more than a skeleton. As it was, the units were far from first-rate fighting forces. The 331st Infantry had five commanders in one week, and only when Col. Robert H. York arrived on 13 July to become the seventh commander did the regiment achieve a measure of stability.

The attached tank battalion had lost half its tanks to enemy fire by 10 July.³¹

The failure of the 83d Division to make gains in mileage was not due to inherent deficiency. General Collins made a personal test on 11 July when he arrived at the division command post at a time when General Macon was visiting a subordinate unit. In an attempt to get the division moving, the corps commander issued specific attack instructions and directed the subsequent attack, but he could not free the division from

³¹ 331st Inf AAR, Jul; 746th Tk Bn Rpt, 10 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl File.

the frustration of advancing, at most, at the rate of several hedgerows per day.

At midnight on 15 July, the 4th and 83d Divisions (the latter less the 330th Infantry) passed to control of the VIII Corps as part of a reorganization along the entire army front. The 83d began to relieve portions of the 4th Division. Several days later, the newly arrived 4th Armored Division completed the relief.³²

Terrain and the enemy had brought the VII Corps to a halt on the Carentan-Périers isthmus by 15 July. "The Germans are staying in there just by the guts of their soldiers," General Barton remarked. "We outnumber them ten to one in infantry, fifty to one in artillery, and by an infinite number in the air."³³ The VII Corps attack nevertheless had achieved several ends: by moving the front line a few miles farther from Carentan, the corps had eliminated the nuisance shelling of the town and its vital highway bridge; it had prevented the Germans from launching a counterattack in the sector considered the weakest along the entire American front; and it had inflicted serious losses on the German forces.³⁴

Counterattack

While the Germans defended stubbornly and adroitly in the zones of the VII and VIII Corps, they directed their greatest effort against the XIX Corps between the Taute and Vire Rivers. This was the sector where the 30th Division and Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division were attacking toward the high ground west of St. Lô.

If the U.S. troops reached their objective, the Germans reasoned, they might unhinge the German line in the Cotentin and outflank not only those units defending la Haye-du-Puits and Périers but also the *II Parachute Corps* in the St. Lô-Caumont sector. To reinforce *Kampfgruppe Heinz* and the small portion of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* resisting between the Taute and the Vire, the *II Parachute Corps* sent part of its reserves, light forces organized around a mobile brigade, to close the gap opened by the American attack. But these troops were obviously too few to dissipate the danger of a serious breakthrough, and the *2d SS Panzer Division* consequently added a tank-infantry task force, which attacked the American flank on 9 July.³⁵

Deciding two days earlier that they needed a strong force between the Taute and the Vire, Kluge and Rommel obtained the *Panzer Lehr Division* from the *Panzer Group West* front in order to mount a major counterattack.³⁶ While the division traveled westward across the Normandy front toward the Taute and Vire region, the inexperience and errors of the U.S. units as much as firm resistance offered by the relatively small German combat groups—the armored task forces and the remnants of *Kampfgruppe Heinz*, reinforced by the parachute corps reserves—prevented a genuine

³² MS # B-455 (Ziegelmann); Telecons, Pemsel and Meindl, 1800, 7 Jul, Hausser and Rommel, 1935, 7 Jul, Criegern and Pemsel, 1945, 7 Jul, *Seventh Army* Tel Msgs; Pemsel and Meindl, 1910, 7 Jul, *AGP B KTB*.

³⁶ Telecons, Rommel and Hausser, 1930, 7 Jul, unidentified, 2005, 7 Jul, Kluge and Rommel, 2020, 7 Jul, and Pemsel and Speidel, 2350, 8 Jul, *AGP B KTB*; *OB WEST KTB*, 7 and 8 Jul.

³² VIII Corps G-3 Per Rpt 33, 18 Jul.

³³ CI 30 (4th Div).

³⁴ See Brereton, *Diaries*, p. 307.

American breakthrough.³⁷ The arrival of advance elements of *Panzer Lehr* on 10 July was to seal off the penetration, while the projected *Panzer Lehr* counter-attack threatened to reverse the situation completely and throw the Americans on the defensive.

General Corlett on 8 July had sent Combat Command A of the 3d Armored Division across the Vire to reinforce the 113th Cavalry Group on the right flank. Adding further to the strength of the already considerable force in the XIX Corps bridgehead, and arriving accidentally in time to meet the attack of *Panzer Lehr*, came the 9th Division, the unit that General Collins had been unable to employ with the rest of his VII Corps on the Carentan-Périers isthmus.

Upon General Hodges' suggestion, General Collins persuaded General Bradley on 8 July that committing the unemployed 9th Division along the east bank of the Taute River would fulfill two useful functions. By outflanking the German resistance on the Carentan-Périers isthmus, the division would help the VII Corps and provide strong protection to the XIX Corps right flank. Bradley decided that the 9th Division's attack would be related more properly to the VII Corps action than to the XIX Corps advance toward St. Lô, so he let Collins retain control of the division. Moving the VII Corps boundary to the east and giving Collins a slice of the XIX Corps zone, General Bradley split the Taute and Vire area between the VII and XIX Corps, the new boundary to be effective as soon as the 9th Division crossed the Vire et Taute Canal and was

ready to attack. General Collins ordered the division to attack westward—between the canal on the north and the St. Jean-de-Daye-le Désert road on the south—toward the Taute River. After making contact with the 83d Division, the 9th was to turn south to cut the Périers-St. Lô highway.³⁸

The 9th Division was thoroughly battle trained. It had participated in the North African invasion and the Sicilian campaign and in June had played a prominent part in the capture of Cherbourg. General Eisenhower considered it one of the two he rated "tops" in the European theater.³⁹ The division commander, Maj Gen. Manton S. Eddy, had organized his headquarters in a fashion that resembled German practice. So that he might be free to visit the line units, Eddy kept the assistant division commander at the command post to make emergency decisions and to supervise the "operational group"—the G-2 and G-3 Sections—while the chief of staff supervised the "administrative group"—the G-1 and G-4 Sections.⁴⁰ The division had considerable potential fire power and mobility. In addition to controlling two extra battalions of artillery, one light and one medium, the 9th Division assumed control of Combat Command A of the 3d Armored Division and also of the 113th Cavalry Group. To keep the mobile armor and cavalry available for emergency use, General Eddy planned to hold them in reserve. At first he would employ his three in-

³⁷ Hodgson, R-54, contains a detailed account of the German resistance.

³⁸ FUSA Opns Instrs, 8 Jul; VII Corps FO 5, 9 Jul; Ltr, Corlett to OCMH, 19 Jan 54; Sylvan Diary, 8 Jul.

³⁹ Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 5 Jul, Pogue Files.

⁴⁰ 12th AGp Immed Rpt 23, 9 Aug.

fantry regiments abreast, attacking westward toward the Taute.

The 9th Division crossed the Vire et Taute Canal on 9 July and was ready on the following morning to meet again the challenge of fighting in the hedgerows. A preparation by dive-bombers and artillery preceded the attack. Two regiments met opposition immediately and to their consternation advanced but several hedgerows. The third regiment had better success clearing the corner formed by the juncture of the Taute River and the Vire et Taute Canal. Resistance was light and enemy artillery conspicuous by its silence. A reconnaissance patrol, however, moving toward Tribehou Island in the Taute River flats, was turned back by mortar and machine gun fire.

That night, as the 9th Division reorganized for attack on the morning of 11 July, enemy fire increased and small groups of tanks and infantry attempted to infiltrate the lines. German tank motors sounded in the distance. From just beyond the division positions came the noise of infantrymen digging in. The 9th Division staff officers depreciated these signs, for they believed that the Germans were merely covering preparations for a general withdrawal during the night. Although the 30th Division on the left reported heavy enemy traffic moving toward the Taute River, the 9th Division staff preferred to accept as more valid an announcement from the 4th Division that the enemy was falling back. This judgment coincided with the view held at First Army headquarters. The army G-2 had interpreted the noisy march across the American front by *Panzer Lehr*, which had

repeatedly broken radio silence en route, as a demonstration of German bluff, an action presaging in reality a general withdrawal.⁴¹

The Germans were not bluffing. Generalleutnant Fritz Bayerlein, the commander of *Panzer Lehr*, had received his march order on 8 July and had moved at once, though poor roads and strafing by Allied planes had hampered the division march. Not until the night of 10 July was the division in position to attack—too late, Rommel thought. *Kampfgruppe Heinz*, which had suffered approximately 30 percent casualties and had virtually disintegrated as an organized unit, was withdrawn to the southwest as artillery of the 17th SS *Panzer Grenadiers* gave covering fire and the 30th *Mobile Brigade* and the tank-infantry teams of the 2d SS *Panzer Division* launched local counterattacks. Hausser, the *Seventh Army* commander, attached these elements to *Panzer Lehr*, visited the division command post, and talked over the details of the attack with Bayerlein. With Rommel pushing for speed, *Panzer Lehr* was to attack at once—that night. (Map 7)

Bayerlein planned to attack with two regimental combat teams abreast. The regiments were to converge on the St. Jean-de-Daye crossroads from the southwest and the south. With the high ground at the crossroads in his possession, he would have command of the American crossing sites over the canal and the river, north and east of St. Jean-de-Daye. Hoping that the night attack would easily achieve a breakthrough,

⁴¹ 9th Div G-3 Jnl, 0005, 0040, 11 Jul, and AAR, Jul; FUSA G-3 Jnl, 0600, 11 Jul, and G-2 Per Rpt 31, 11 Jul.

Bayerlein envisioned the infantry riding tanks to the objective. The *II Parachute Corps* was to launch a feint directly north from St. Lô in a limited objective attack along the east bank of the Vire River.⁴²

The jump-off was scheduled for 0145, 11 July. Unfortunately for *Panzer Lehr*, Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division in driving toward Hauts-Vents had jostled and delayed the leading panzer elements getting ready to attack. Still in firm possession of Hauts-Vents, *Panzer Lehr* jumped off just before dawn, 11 July, after a short artillery preparation. The routes of attack passed on both sides of CCB. The regiment on the right, moving close to the Vire River through Pont-Hébert, aimed for the Airel bridge and struck the 30th Division. The regiment on the left, moving through le Désert, struck the 30th and 9th Divisions.⁴³

In the 9th Division sector, the division staff still was not seriously perturbed even after receiving reports at 0300 of German infiltration along the left flank. Two hours later the fact that Germans were making noise, were firing a great deal, and appeared "to be all around now" occasioned little more than nonchalance mixed with some incredulity. Not until the division artillery reported some confusion because German infantrymen were approaching the gun positions did the staff realize that a counterattack was under way. About the same time an infantry battalion command post was overrun. As reports began to in-

dicade that enemy tanks were throughout the division area, telephone lines from all the regiments went out. Still the situation did not seem serious enough to wake the division commander.⁴⁴

Panzer Lehr's leading elements on the left—two battalions of armored infantry, a company of tanks, and two companies of self-propelled guns—had actually made two shallow penetrations of the U.S. lines near le Désert, one along a regimental boundary of the 9th Division, the other between the 9th and 30th Divisions. The penetrations prompted confusion and some withdrawal before subordinate American commanders could begin to control their troops in close-range fighting.

After daylight brought some amelioration of the confusion, and after wiremen by 0900 had restored communications to the regiments, General Eddy got a coordinated defense into action. Infantrymen cut behind German spearheads to seal routes of withdrawal, while tanks, tank destroyers, and infantry bazooka teams stalked the isolated enemy armor.⁴⁵ Tank destroyers alone claimed destruction of at least one Mark IV and twelve Mark V (Panther) tanks. The division artillery pounded enemy tanks parked along the road west of le Désert. American planes flying other missions

⁴⁴ 9th Div G-3 Jnl, 0305, 0515, 0525, 11 Jul.

⁴⁵ Capt. James D. Allgood and 1st Lt. William F. Squire of the 47th Infantry received the DSC for their efforts in repelling the counterattack. T/3 Henry J. Kucharski of the Medical Detachment, 47th Infantry, when unable to render aid because of fire, ripped off his Red Cross armband and waved it in front of him as he advanced toward wounded men. The enemy recognized his mission and halted fire. When a German officer approached, Kucharski sued for and secured a thirty-minute truce, time for him to treat and evacuate American casualties. He received the DSC.

⁴² *Pz Lehr FO*, 10 Jul, in *Pz Lehr Div Ib KTB*; *Seventh Army KTB*, 10 Jul; 3d Armd Div CCB G-2 Daily Narrative, 7-16 Jul.

⁴³ See below, Chapter VIII, for the *II Parachute Corps* feint down the east bank of the Vire River.

were diverted to counter the *Panzer Lehr* threat, and one formation dropped twenty-two 500-pound bombs on a German armored column.

By the middle of the afternoon of 11 July, the 9th Division had contained the enemy attack. General Eddy was then able to launch his own counter-attack and regain ground abandoned earlier in the day. Because of the possibility of further enemy armored action, Eddy established a strong defensive line, giving particular attention to antitank precautions. The 9th Division had sustained little more than a hundred casualties. The only effect of the *Panzer Lehr* effort was to delay the 9th Division attack twenty-four hours.

Along the boundary between the 9th and 30th Divisions, confusion had at first also prevailed among men of the 30th. At a roadblock on a secondary route, guards heard tanks approaching, but were told by higher headquarters that American tanks were in the vicinity. The men let a column of tanks and infantry pass before noticing that the soldiers in the column were speaking German. They immediately alerted troops in the rear who engaged the column with antitank rifles and bazookas. Individual groups of infantrymen spontaneously and with little coordination or direction destroyed five enemy tanks and four armored scout cars, two of the latter mounting flame throwers. Machine guns emplaced earlier that evening for all-around security fired into the ranks of enemy infantry. As the night exploded into sound and flash, the noise of withdrawing tanks gradually became discernible. In the morning it was obvious that the point

of the enemy armored column had been blunted and the main body forced to withdraw.

At the same time, units of the 30th Division near the west bank of the Vire River were repelling the other regimental column of *Panzer Lehr*. Before noon of 11 July, U.S. troops had contained the enemy attack in that area and had cleared German stragglers from the division rear.⁴⁶ Though General Hobbs launched his own attack, it ran into resistance at once and made only slight gain.

The effect of the *Panzer Lehr* attack was not confined to the front line. At the still inadequate crossing sites over the Vire, military policemen had been driven from their traffic control posts by the increased enemy shelling. Traffic quickly coagulated. To relieve the congestion and reduce the possibility of embarrassment if a direct shell hit destroyed a bridge, a Bailey bridge was erected and completed late on 12 July; it took somewhat longer than normal because of continuing German fire.⁴⁷

The 30th Division estimated that, with CCB, it had destroyed about 20 Mark IV tanks on 11 July. General Collins judged that the VII Corps had destroyed over 30 German tanks, most of them in the 9th Division sector. Three tactical air squadrons, which had bombed Ger-

⁴⁶ 2d Lt. Richard A. Kirsting of the 246th Engineer Combat Battalion was awarded the DSC for heroic action that resulted in the capture of forty Germans.

⁴⁷ As army engineers manipulated the Carentan locks on 14 July in an attempt to drain the flooded areas of the Cotentin, the Vire River water level descended so rapidly that it endangered the temporary bridge and made additional trestling necessary. XIX Corps Engr Sec Jnl and Sitreps, XIX Corps AAR, Jul.



GERMAN PANTHERS knocked out near le Désert, 11 July.

man armored columns, claimed 19 tanks destroyed, 2 probably destroyed, and 7 damaged; 2 half-tracks destroyed and 6 damaged.⁴⁸ Perhaps more important, at the height of the counterattack, CCB of the 3d Armored Division had been attacking Hauts-Vents and Hill 91, objectives the unit secured at 1730, 11 July. Without this commanding terrain, *Panzer Lehr* was in the situation of having had the prop knocked out from under its effort; an immediate resumption of the counterattack was out of the question.

The effect of the American action was considerable. *Panzer Lehr* had lost a quarter of its effective combat strength. One task force had started out with 6 infantry officers, 40 noncommissioned officers, and 198 enlisted men (with 36 light machine guns, 5 heavy machine

guns, and 10 bazookas), plus a company of tanks (10); only 7 noncommissioned officers and 23 men had returned with their individual small arms and 6 light machine guns. The *Panzer Lehr* counterattack had been a dismal and costly failure.⁴⁹

Prompt American reaction was only part of the story. More important was the presence of the 9th Division, which the Germans had not known was there. Hastily executing an attack that had come too late, Bayerlein had tried a blitzkrieg in the hedgerows against a numerically superior American force. He had also courted defeat in detail by committing his two assault columns along routes that turned out to be too far apart for mutual support.

Judging the attack to have been an attempt to cut through to Isigny and

⁴⁸ VII Corps Msgs, 1100, 1230, 1505, 2300, 11 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl File; 3d Arm'd Div CCB G-2 Daily Narrative, 7-16 Jul.

⁴⁹ Telcon, Pemsel to Tempelhoff, 1000, 15 Jul, Seventh Army Tel Msgs; Rommel to Kluge, 15 Jul, OB WEST KTB, Anlage 646.

divide the Allied beachhead, the Americans disparaged the German plan as carelessly conceived, hastily organized, and imperfectly directed. This appraisal overestimated the importance of the effort. As far back as 13 June, when German troops had failed to retake Carentan, tactical commanders had abandoned all hope of regaining Isigny and the coast in that sector, even though as late as 24 June Hitler talked about the possibility of recovering Carentan. From the *Panzer Lehr* attack the Germans had expected little more than limited success, but even that came to naught. By 12 July *Panzer Lehr* was entirely committed in passive defense. Its only accomplishment was having "stopped the American drive to St. Gilles," the high ground west of St. Lô. Bayerlein congratulated his troops for that.⁵⁰

If *Panzer Lehr* had not succeeded in eliminating the U.S. positions south of the Vire et Taute Canal, it was at least in position to block American attempts to continue quickly to the south. Nor was it by this time alone. The original decision to move *Panzer Lehr* from the *Panzer Group West* front had been made at least partially because units outside Normandy that were to reinforce the front still had not arrived. *OB WEST* had wanted to move the *5th Parachute Division* from Brittany to Normandy but needed Hitler's permission to do so. Hitler delayed because the division had been rated in June as suitable only for defensive missions. As various echelons discussed the question of whether the

parachutists' training was sufficiently advanced for the unit to be committed in Normandy, the troops of the division sat idle along the roads in Brittany. After much lobbying of OKW by *OB WEST* staff members, Kluge on 7 July, finally wheedled Hitler's reluctant consent and ordered the paratroopers to march on foot to Normandy. Young troops under inexperienced commanders, they moved into the Taute and Vire area behind *Panzer Lehr* during the night of 11 July. Behind them came the additional forces of the *275th Infantry Division*.⁵¹ Bolstering the *Panzer Lehr* defenses, they were in position to hamper the 9th and 30th Division efforts to move south to the Périers-St. Lô highway.

Although General Bradley felt that his troops had "pretty well chewed up the *Panzer Lehr*," that the Germans were "on their last legs," and that the American offensive "should open up," subordinate commanders were of the opinion that the *Panzer Lehr* soldiers were "great big, husky boys, and arrogant . . . not beaten at all."⁵²

Toward the Périers-St. Lô Road

Although the ground between the Taute and Vire Rivers was intrinsically suitable for the application of a unified command, General Bradley had split the

⁵⁰ 90th Div G-3 Jnl File, 11 and 12 Jul, and AAR, Jul; [Garth], *St.-Lô*, pp. 36-42; Hodgson, R-54; *Pz Lehr* FO, 11 Jul, *Pz Lehr Div Ib KTB*.

⁵¹ *Seventh Army KTB*, 12 Jul; *OB WEST KTB*, 6 Jul; Telecons, 1030, 5 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; Msg, 1900, 5 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*; Telecons, Helmdach and Tempelhoff, 1000, 6 Jul, Zimmerman and Tempelhoff, 2345, 6 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; Telecons, Tempelhoff and Helmdach, 0015, 7 Jul, Pemsel and Zoeller, 0630, 7 Jul, Hausser and Rommel, 2245, 11 Jul, *Seventh Army Tel Msgs*.

⁵² Telecons, Corlett and Hobbs, 1422, 1507, 1614, 11 Jul.

region in two. The 9th Division on the right (west) thus could operate with the VII Corps and toward the objectives of that corps. The 30th Division on the left (east) carried the XIX Corps attack toward the high ground west of St. Lô.

On 10 July, when the 9th Division first had been committed between the Taute and the Vire, General Eddy was supposed to have secured the east bank of the Taute River before turning south to cut the Périers-St. Lô highway. To secure the river bank, he had attacked westward toward four specific objectives adjoining the stream: the corner formed by the juncture of the Taute River and the Vire et Taute Canal; the island of Tribehou, a hedgerowed mound of earth the possession of which would enable the 83d Division to make an administrative rather than an assault crossing of the Taute; the Bois du Hommet, a scrub forest that the Germans were using as an assembly area for troops and supplies; and the peninsula of Vincenterie. With these objectives cleared and a portion of the 83d Division across the Taute and operating on the 9th Division's right flank, General Eddy could then turn south to cut the east-west highway between Périers and St. Lô. (*See Maps 5 and II.*)

General Eddy had secured only one of his objectives, the corner formed by the river and the canal, when the *Panzer Lehr* attack disrupted his plans. To forestall a recurrence, Eddy oriented the 47th Infantry (Col. George W. Smythe) toward the south so as to be ready to swing west to outflank and isolate the spearhead of any counterattack. The 39th Infantry (Col. Harry A. Flint) was to drive along the axis of the highway

west of le Désert against what appeared to be the main German defenses. The 60th Infantry (Col. Jesse L. Gibney) was to secure the three remaining objectives that adjoined the east bank of the Taute.

Attacking on 12 July, the 60th Infantry met little opposition. While the 24th Reconnaissance Squadron of Colonel Biddle's 113th Cavalry Group blocked Tribehou on the northeast, the 60th bypassed it. Patrols found the northern portion of the Bois du Hommet unoccupied, and after an artillery preparation fired by eight battalions, the regiment moved through the forest in force against light resistance. Another artillery preparation that evening preceded an infantry move into Vincenterie, which was occupied by midnight. The reconnaissance squadron cleared Tribehou of weak forces on the following day, 13 July.

The 60th Infantry's quick success found no counterpart in the other regimental sectors. Battling west and south of le Désert, the 39th and 47th Regiments met an obdurate enemy. The Germans had shifted their forces to strengthen their positions near le Désert, and they were aggressive. Small tank-infantry combat teams provided a roving defense employing tactics of surprise.⁵³ As the 39th Infantry fought from hedgerow to hedgerow astride the le Désert road, a small German force, with mortars and self-propelled guns, worked around the flank of a rifle company late in the afternoon of 12 July. Sudden German fire inflicted heavy casualties, including all the company

⁵³ *Panzer Lehr* FO, 11 Jul, *Panzer Lehr Div Ib KTB*; *Seventh Army KTB* (Draft), 11-13 Jul.