

infantry would reach and secure Marigny and St. Gilles without great difficulty. General Collins would then catapult his armor forward.

On the VII Corps right (west), the 330th Infantry (detached from the 83d Division) was to seize a part of the Périers-St. Lô highway, including a vital road intersection, and block to the west in order to hamper any German attack from Périers against the corps right flank. In effect, the regiment was to secure and hold the pivot on which the VII Corps main effort was to swing in its turn toward Coutances. Eventually, the 330th Infantry was also to turn westward and join its parent unit and VIII Corps.<sup>50</sup>

The immediate regimental objective was near the Taute River flats, marshy hedgerowed lowland that was outside the COBRA bombardment area. Because the 83d Division had been unable a week earlier to force a crossing of the Taute River over the la Varde causeway, Germans still occupied the la Varde peninsula and constituted a threat to the regimental right flank.<sup>51</sup> Dispersed over a large area, without strength in depth, facing hedgerowed lowlands, about to attack enemy troops that had not been affected by the COBRA bombardment, and harassed by tank destroyer fire from the right rear near Marchésieux, the regiment had a mission as difficult as it was vital.

The advance was rapid so long as fighter-bombers and medium bombers were still striking the COBRA target area southeast of the regimental positions.

<sup>50</sup> Min of Mtg (on COBRA), 21 Jul, 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File; 330th Inf (COBRA) Attack Plan, n.d., 9th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>51</sup> See above, Ch. XI.

In forty minutes the assault battalion advanced 800 yards. When the planes left, the Germans raised their heads from their foxholes, discovered that the saturation bombing had taken place several miles away, and realized that they were not at all hurt. Opening fire from their hedgerow positions and quickly repairing breaks in communication wires caused by a few stray bombs, the soldiers of the regiment that the *5th Parachute Division* controlled soon achieved a co-ordinated defense that stopped the 330th Infantry. At the same time, shells from Marchésieux began to fall on the 330th's right flank.

The 330th Infantry could get no farther than a point several hundred yards short of its objective. Counter-battery fire by the 83d Division Artillery seemed to have little effect in reducing the volume of enemy shells. Unless a bombing attack destroyed the Marchésieux emplacements and thus eliminated the threat to the regimental right rear, there seemed little hope that the 330th Infantry would attain its immediate COBRA objective.<sup>52</sup>

The 9th Division was to attack to Marigny, along the main highway, which was later to serve the principal exploiting thrust. General Eddy's regiments were to peel off to the west in order to uncover the highway and form a strong protective line facing west. The terrain in the zone of advance—low ridges and small marshes—was rather difficult.

After some confusion occasioned by the bombing errors, the assault units moved rather quickly through the hostile outpost line north of the Périers-St.

<sup>52</sup> 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl and File, 25 Jul, and AAR, Jul.

Lô highway, containing and bypassing several strongpoints that were still active. Once across the line of departure, the troops were surprised to find increasingly troublesome centers of resistance. Despite the saturation bombing, groups of enemy soldiers were still fighting stubbornly. When the 9th Division shifted its weight to the west and met Germans who had been outside the bombardment carpet, the infantry made little progress.

The assault units of the 9th Division, with several exceptions, did not reach their initial objectives. One battalion that did arrive at its objective was prohibited by division order from continuing lest it get too far ahead of the others. Another battalion, which had advanced a thousand yards down the Marigny road, also received the order to halt and consolidate for the night even though it had encountered only sporadic small arms and long-range artillery fire. The caution that General Eddy was demonstrating illustrated American surprise at the tenacity of the German opposition. Enemy troops that had escaped the bomb blast seemed not at all affected by what had happened to nearby units that had been obliterated in the bombardment.

In the center of the VII Corps sector, General Barton had committed only one regiment of the 4th Division. With but slight disorganization because of the short bombing, the 8th Infantry attacked with two battalions abreast on a 2,000-yard front on good terrain for offensive action. One assault battalion immediately bypassed a German strongpoint north of the Périers-St. Lô highway, the line of departure, and moved rapidly south for a mile and a half against scattered opposition; at nightfall the

leading troops were just east of la Chapelle-en-Juger. The other assault battalion struck an orchard full of Germans who had such effective fields of fire that the battalion could not sideslip the obstruction. After a two-hour delay, eighteen supporting tanks, which had temporarily lost contact with the infantry, arrived and blasted the orchard. The resistance disintegrated. The battalion crossed the Périers-St. Lô highway and encountered no opposition for 700 yards, but then two German tanks and a line of enemy soldiers along a sunken road again stopped the battalion. Once more the supporting Shermans had become separated from the infantry. The battalion made a double envelopment of the enemy strongpoint and knocked out the two enemy tanks with bazooka fire. Still the enemy held. After the Shermans finally rumbled up, a few rounds of tank fire destroyed the defense. Receiving a sudden order to seize la Chapelle-en-Juger, the battalion changed direction and gained the edge of town. American artillery fire falling nearby brought the attack to a halt.

On the corps left, oriented toward St. Gilles, the 30th Division recovered with amazing quickness from the demoralizing effect of the short bombing.<sup>53</sup> Soon after the infantry started forward American planes bombed and strafed the troops again, driving them into ditches and bomb craters. More angry than scared, the men advanced once more.

They had a twofold mission. The 30th Division was to clear the road to

<sup>53</sup> The assistant division commander, General Harrison, who later was awarded the DSC, was on hand to inspire men who appeared to be on the verge of panic.

St. Gilles for the armored thrust to follow and was also to establish roadblocks at the bridges across the Vire River south of St. Lô. The bridges across the Vire had been bombed by tactical aircraft in pre-COBRA operations, and although some structures were damaged or destroyed, actual possession of the bridge sites by 30th Division infantrymen would enhance the security of the COBRA east flank.<sup>54</sup> As the 30th Division veered eastward and uncovered the road to St. Gilles, an armored column, alerted to follow, would drive south to foil German reinforcement from the southeast. General Hobbs thus mounted a two-pronged attack, one thrusting toward St. Gilles, the other pointing toward the high ground inside the horseshoe loop of the Vire River at St. Lô. The minimum assignment for the division was capture of Hébécrevon.

Just across the Périers-St. Lô highway, 30th Division troops met a roadblock built around three Mark V tanks. A frontal three-company attack, supported by Shermans, failed to dislodge the roadblock and resulted in the loss of three American tanks. An attempted double envelopment brought infantrymen into contact with additional German centers of resistance. Aggressive reconnaissance and excellent tank-infantry co-ordination were finally responsible for knocking out a dozen armored vehicles and uprooting the German defense.

In attacking Hébécrevon, the 30th Division had to cross a valley, using an unpaved and mined road with precipitous banks, and make a frontal assault against commanding terrain. Because German fire prevented American en-

gineers from clearing the road of mines, tanks could not accompany the infantry. Lack of alternate roads, absence of stream-crossing sites, closeness of adjacent units, and troop congestion precluded maneuver. An air strike seemingly had no effect on the volume of enemy fire. In the early evening the regimental commander of the 119th Infantry sought clarification of what appeared to be a paradoxical mission: was he to seize Hébécrevon or was he to bypass enemy resistance? Both, replied General Hobbs; "The important thing was to gain control of the crossroad in the town."<sup>55</sup> But not until darkness fell were infantrymen and tanks able to move against Hébécrevon. Soldiers acting like seeing-eye dogs led Shermans around bomb craters and through mine fields into positions for direct fire. Their shelling soon had the desired effect. Around midnight American troops entered Hébécrevon.

The ground attack following the COBRA bombardment on 25 July moved the VII Corps across the Périers-St. Lô highway but not much farther. Although crossing the highway was no mean achievement, the prevailing American attitude was far from elation. The immediate verdict of American commanders judging the effectiveness of the COBRA air strike was virtually unanimous: the bombardment had had almost no effect on the enemy. German artillery fire on 25 July had been light when compared to that of the previous day, but still the volume had been strong. The difference could be ascribed to low ammunition stocks or to

<sup>54</sup> [George], Ninth Air Force, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup> Hobbs, Telecons, 1750, 1917, and 2225, 25 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

the disruption of communications: the "enemy artillery," Americans believed, "was not touched by our bombing."<sup>56</sup> Admittedly, the planes had damaged and destroyed equipment and had inflicted personnel losses in the bombed area, but the "effect of the bombing on the elimination of infantry resistance was negligible." Had not the Germans continued to contest every inch of ground?<sup>57</sup> General Hobbs was more blunt: "There is no indication of bombing," he stated, "in where we have gone so far."<sup>58</sup>

The truth of the matter was that "saturation" bombing had not saturated the entire target. Some American units had moved rapidly through areas in which the German defenses had obviously been neutralized by the bombardment.<sup>59</sup> Others had met resistance they had not expected.

The disappointment resulted in the main from overanticipation and overconfidence in the results of the bombardment. Many American troops had expected the bombardment to eliminate resistance in the target area; they thought that all the Germans would be killed or wounded; they had looked forward to the prospect of strolling through the bomb target area. The fact that some enemy groups had survived and were able to fight seemed to prove that the air bombardment had failed to achieve its purpose. The troops apparently had not realized that air bombardment and artillery fire, even under the most favorable conditions, do not completely

destroy the enemy, but by inflicting heavy losses weaken him physically and morally, disorganize his defenses, and make him vulnerable to infantry attack.<sup>60</sup>

The bombing errors that had taken American lives heightened the sense of discouragement. Comparatively few bombs had produced heavy casualties. Only gradually did the attitude of depression change. The bombing of American troops, it developed, "was not as bad as it seemed at first."<sup>61</sup> It had not materially disrupted the ground attack. The bombardment had, after all, knocked a hole in the German defenses. German prisoners were visibly shaken and dazed. Steel bomb fragments had shredded light vehicles, perforated heavy equipment, cut tank treads, splintered trees, smashed houses, and shattered communications in the enemy sector.<sup>62</sup>

Judged from the point of view of geographical advance, the ground attack had nevertheless gained relatively little terrain. The VII Corps had advanced the line only about a mile south of the Périers-St. Lô highway. That this was the case, even though only isolated and un-co-ordinated German groups remained to contest the advance, could be explained partially by the fact that the initial disappointment itself had nullified to a large extent General Bradley's injunction to be bold. The battle of the hedgerows during the preceding weeks had inflicted its psychological toll on the combat forces. Habits of caution

<sup>56</sup> 30th Div G-2 Per Rpt, 25 Jul; 9th Div Arty AAR, Jul.

<sup>57</sup> 9th Div G-2 Per Rpt, 0030, 26 Jul.

<sup>58</sup> Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 1550, 25 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, 47th Inf S-3 Per Rpt, 26 Jul.

<sup>60</sup> 12th AGP Immed Rpt 20, 8 Aug.

<sup>61</sup> 9th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1201, 26 Jul.

<sup>62</sup> See Brereton, *Diaries*, pp. 316-17; Wilmot, *Struggle for Europe*, pp. 39off.

could not be dissipated by an air strike or by an order. The presence of German defenders *per se* implied stubborn and skillful opposition.

The ground attack had actually succeeded better than anyone supposed. The VII Corps infantrymen had destroyed almost all the Germans who survived the bombardment, but the Germans knew this better than the Americans. It would have been hard to convince the 330th Infantry, for example, which had not yet crossed the Périers-St. Lô highway, that a yawning hole existed before the VII Corps. The 9th Division also was far short of Marigny; the committed regiment of the 4th Division had not secured la Chapelle-en-Juger; and the 30th Division had had great difficulty taking Hébécrevon and uncovering a small part of the road to St. Gilles.<sup>63</sup> In the opinion of American commanders, a clean penetration had not been made by the end of 25 July. They could not believe that once the troops broke through the main line of resistance, which in actuality they already had, there was "nothing in back to stop us."<sup>64</sup>

For his part, General Collins noted the absence of co-ordination in the Ger-

man defense. If this meant that the enemy main line of resistance had been smashed, Collins reasoned, then the Germans must not be permitted to refashion another and he should commit his mobile reserves immediately. On the other hand, if the Germans had been forewarned by the premature bombing of 24 July, had withdrawn their main line, and escaped the full force of the main bombardment, then the sporadic nature of their defense possibly presaged a counterattack. If the German defenses had not been pierced, or if the Germans had erected another line, committing additional forces to the attack might promote a congestion that could prove fatal.

To General Collins a decision either to commit or to withhold his mobile striking force was a gamble. The infantry had not secured the minimum objectives deemed prerequisite for commitment of the armor. Nevertheless, he noted that the vital roads south to Marigny and to St. Gilles appeared to have been uncovered sufficiently to permit at least the commencement of the armored thrusts. Collins chose to move. During the afternoon of 25 July he decided to commit the armor on the following morning.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> VII Corps Sitrep 99, 26 Jul.

<sup>64</sup> VII Corps G-2 Memo, 25 Jul, VII Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

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<sup>65</sup> The earliest indication discovered of Collins' decision is a telephone conversation at 1745, 25 July, in 30th Division G-3 Journal and File.

## CHAPTER XIII

# The Breakthrough

Although the armored phase of COBRA was about to begin, the infantry on the morning of 26 July still had much to do. While getting out of the paths of the armored columns, they had to broaden the penetration achieved after the big bombardment and insure its permanence.<sup>1</sup> This was no minor assignment; the infantry found that, even though the Germans were considerably disorganized, enemy morale had not been "shaken to the point where the individual soldier will not carry out his mission, which still is to defend every inch of ground and inflict . . . as many casualties as possible."<sup>2</sup> (*See Map V.*)

### *German Reaction*

The first report to give German higher headquarters any picture of what had happened after the COBRA bombardment revealed that the Americans had penetrated the main line of defense. German commanders learned at 1600, 25 July, that American troops were south of the Périers-St. Lô highway, in Montreuil, and on the road to Marigny.<sup>3</sup> Choltitz immediately committed part of

his *LXXXIV Corps* reserve, a reinforced regiment of the *353d Division*. From an assembly area south of Périers, the regiment moved eastward to secure la Chapelle-en-Juger and thereby seal off the penetration. Not long afterward, Hausser committed part of his *Seventh Army* reserve, a regiment of the *275th Division*, which, from its assembly area near Canisy, also moved toward la Chapelle-en-Juger. Thus, Choltitz and Hausser, acting on the same idea, sent two converging columns to deny the Americans the vital road network controlled by the village in the center of the attack zone.

Hausser hoped that retention of la Chapelle-en-Juger would permit him to re-establish a main line of resistance eastward to Hébécrevon, but he was unaware of the extent of the disaster that had overcome his troops. His command channels had been disrupted by the COBRA bombing and were saturated with overdue messages. Counting on the *5th Parachute Division*, which controlled one regiment, to hold its positions near the Taute River and prevent the Americans from broadening their breach, he was not disappointed, for the paratroopers checked any genuine advance by the *330th Infantry*. But Hausser also counted on the *352d Division* (under *II Parachute Corps*) to hold the west bank of the Vire River and prevent

<sup>1</sup> 3d Armd Div Ltr of Instrs, 26 Jul (issued orally by CG VII Corps, 25 Jul).

<sup>2</sup> 9th Div FO 11, 26 Jul.

<sup>3</sup> Telecon, Helmdach and Tempelhoff, 1600, 25 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; see also Morning and Daily Sitreps, 25 Jul, *LXXXIV Corps Meldungen*; *Seventh Army KTB*, 25 Jul.

an American penetration near Hébécrevon. What he did not know was that *Panzer Lehr* had lost the bulk of its organic infantry, at least fourteen of its assault guns, and ten of its few remaining tanks; that *Kampfgruppe Heinz* and the other regiment of the *5th Parachute Division*, both attached to *Panzer Lehr*, had been demolished; and that the regiment of the *275th Division* moving up from Canisy was about to be crushed by American fighter-bombers and infantry. The result was an open left flank for the *352d Division*, and in that condition the unit was simply too weak to hold Hébécrevon, much less seal off a penetration.

Ignorant of these developments and of the loss of Hébécrevon, which opened the route to St. Gilles, the German army and corps commanders in the Cotentin exuded optimism on the morning of 26 July. Choltitz committed the remainder of the *353d Division* eastward toward the Montreuil-Marigny line to slow the efforts of the 9th Division. Hausser, while waiting for the destroyed and virtually nonexistent regiment of the *275th Division* to move northwest from Canisy, decided to launch a counterattack with the company of tanks and the company of infantry of the *2d SS Panzer Division* that he still had in army reserve. He committed this force in the Marigny area, where it met American armor and infantry.

Kluge, who had been diverted to the Caen sector on 25 July by the Canadian attack, thought the situation in the Cotentin might be worse than his subordinates suspected. He suggested that Hausser withdraw the left of the *LXXXIV Corps* slightly in order to shorten the front. This would make it

possible to disengage the entire *2d SS Panzer Division* for a counterattack. By this time, however, U.S. troops on the Cotentin west coast were attacking and tying down the *LXXXIV Corps* left. Hausser could not disengage the entire panzer division; by evening he had succeeded in freeing only one tank battalion and one infantry battalion from the battle. He moved these units eastward toward the breakthrough sector.<sup>4</sup>

Hausser's difficulty with the panzer division was only part of the story. By late afternoon on 25 July he had counted seven distinct American penetrations of his Lessay-St. Lô defensive line. He had also received Bayerlein's report that *Panzer Lehr* had practically no infantry left and that the division was about to cease to exist as an organized unit. Hausser therefore proposed a general withdrawal to Coutances of those *LXXXIV Corps* units in the coastal sector of the Cotentin. Still hoping that la Chapelle-en-Juger was not entirely lost, he thought of manning an outpost line between that village and Geffosses, the latter near the west coast.

Suspecting that a withdrawal might turn into a rout, Kluge insisted on restraint. He ordered Hausser to prepare a main line of resistance from Pirou through Millières to Périers in order to keep the Geffosses-St. Sauveur-Lendelin-Marigny road in German hands. He instructed Hausser to place all his available personnel on the front (rather than echeloning his defense in depth) in order to prevent immediately further American advances. He also repeated

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<sup>4</sup> Telecons, Kluge and Hausser, 1010, 26 Jul, Pemsel and Tempelhoff, 1830, 26 Jul, AGp B KTB.

a request, which he had been making to OKW since 13 July, that OKW permit the *9th Panzer Division* to be brought up from southern France to reinforce the *Seventh Army* at once.<sup>5</sup>

### *Penetration*

On the morning of 26 July, the situation from the American point of view did not appear very bright. On the right of VII Corps, the 330th Infantry, which was to safeguard the flank of the COBRA main effort by cutting the Périers-St. Lô highway, securing a road intersection, and turning gradually westward, was hopeful of accomplishing its missions early on 26 July, for the tank destroyer fire that had been harassing the regiment from Marchésieux ceased.<sup>6</sup> But it soon became evident that the German paratroopers in opposition were as determined as ever. Not until late in the evening was the 330th Infantry able to cross the Périers-St. Lô highway, and even then the Germans continued to deny the regiment its crossroads objective.<sup>7</sup>

Instructed to permit the principal COBRA armored column to pass through his 9th Division zone, General Eddy on 26 July had to clear both enemy troops and his own from the Marigny road.

<sup>5</sup> *Seventh Army KTB*, 26 Jul; *LXXXIV Corps Daily Sitrep*, 26 Jul, in *LXXXIV Corps Meldungen*; Kluge Order, 1935, 26 Jul, *AGp B Op. Befehle*; Telecons, Kluge and Jodl, 1828, 13 Jul, and Kluge and Zimmerman, 1750, 26 Jul, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen 615, 860, and 862*.

<sup>6</sup> Overlay to accompany 9th Div G-3 Per Rpt, 2400, 25 Jul; 83d Div G-2, G-3 Jnl, entry 0915, 26 Jul.

<sup>7</sup> 83d Div AAR, Jul, and G-3 Per Rpt 30, 26 Jul; 9th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1100, 1145, 2025, and 2100, 26 Jul.

He had to prevent the enemy from cutting the road and thereby blunting the main COBRA thrust. Restricted to a narrow zone of operations and facing German forces unharmed by the COBRA bombardment, General Eddy maneuvered his units so that the 9th Division by the end of the day was two and a half miles south of the Périers-St. Lô highway and almost two miles west of the Marigny road. The division had sustained almost 200 casualties and had captured somewhat fewer prisoners. Although General Eddy had prevented his own troops from hampering an armored column moving south and had kept the Marigny road clear of enemy fire to the extent of his penetration, he faced the opposition of the *353d Division*, which, in trying to retake la Chapelle-en-Juger, threatened the VII Corps right flank.<sup>8</sup>

The 8th Infantry of the 4th Division took la Chapelle-en-Juger in the early morning of 26 July. Combat patrols had entered the village during the night, but the village crossroads was not secured until morning.<sup>9</sup> Continuing south, the regiment moved slowly, clearing isolated enemy groups. Commitment of the reserve battalion in the afternoon provided enough added weight for a three-mile surge that overran part of the *353d Division* and put *Panzer Lehr* artillery units to flight. Early that evening the leading troops engaged what seemed like the remnants of a German battalion, captured about a company of miscella-

<sup>8</sup> 9th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 1140, 1145, 1406, 1545, 2040, 26 Jul; 39th Inf S-3 Rpt, 26 Jul; VII Corps Sitreps 100 and 101, 26 Jul.

<sup>9</sup> Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 2215, 25 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; 8th Inf Msg, 1020, 26 Jul, 4th Div G-3 Jnl File.

neous troops, and destroyed or dispersed the others. The regiment cut the Coutances-St. Lô highway and at the end of the day was about five miles south of the COBRA line of departure.<sup>10</sup>

On the corps left, the 30th Division had not only to protect the COBRA flank but also to permit an American armored column to pass through the division zone for exploitation beyond St. Gilles. Enemy artillery fire from what was estimated to be one medium and three light battalions, as well as from several 88-mm. guns, checked any real advance during the morning of 26 July; but counterbattery missions delivered by the artillery units of the 30th Division, the VII Corps, and the XIX Corps produced the desired effect early that afternoon. As the division began to advance against diminishing artillery and mortar fire, an armored column passed through the division zone and drove toward St. Gilles.<sup>11</sup>

The 117th Infantry, attacking toward the loop of the Vire River, was stopped at a steep ravine where a well-positioned line held by part of the 352d Division was supported by *II Parachute Corps* artillery firing from the high ground south of St. Lô. The regiment made five different attempts to overcome the resistance, but without success. Though close support by fighter-bombers might have aided the attack, General Hobbs was reluctant to request it because he feared a repetition of bombing errors. Accepting the apprehension as valid, General Collins did not press for the employment of tactical air. Not until

evening, after a heavy 4.2-inch mortar preparation that coincided with a German withdrawal, did the regiment cross the ravine and move quickly to the entrance of the loop, less than two miles west of St. Lô.<sup>12</sup>

The 119th Infantry, the other assault regiment, moved rapidly in the afternoon for two miles south of Hébécrevon and cut the Coutances-St. Lô highway. Given a new mission at once—cutting the Canisy-St. Lô highway two miles to the south—the regiment was half way to its objective by nightfall. At this point the leading troops of the 30th Division were more than three miles south of the pre-COBRA positions.

By late afternoon of 26 July, General Collins no longer doubted that his forces had achieved a clear penetration of the enemy defenses. Deeming that the situation demanded speed rather than caution, he told the infantry divisions to continue their attacks through the night.<sup>13</sup>

General Collins' directive coincided with a German order to make a slight withdrawal. During the night of 26 July the German units west of the Taute River—those comprising the left of the *LXXXIV Corps*—withdrew slightly along the coast and took up a new line of defense anchored on Périers and Marchéieux. The *6th Parachute Regiment* passed into the corps reserve at St. Sauveur-Lendelin. Just to the right of the corps boundary, the 352d Division of the *II Parachute Corps*, already out-

<sup>10</sup> 4th Div AAR, Jul.

<sup>11</sup> 30th Div G-2 Per Rpt, 26 Jul, and G-3 Jnl, 26 Jul.

<sup>12</sup> Telecon, Hobbs and Kelly, 1535, 25 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; 30th Div FO 14, 25 Jul; MS # B-489 (Ziegelmann).

<sup>13</sup> VII Corps Opns Memo 49, 27 Jul (confirming oral orders, 26 Jul).

flanked, also withdrew from the loop of the Vire and along the west bank of the Vire River—in order to try to re-establish contact with *Panzer Lehr*.<sup>14</sup> This could be no more than a hope, for by that time there was virtually no organized resistance between the 352d and the 5th *Parachute Divisions*, though the German higher commands did not seem to know it.

Although the 330th Infantry on the extreme right flank of the VII Corps again struck stonewall resistance, all the other infantry units advanced during the night of 26 July. The 9th Division secured a road junction of local importance. The 8th Infantry of the 4th Division, leaving its vehicles and antitank guns behind, moved unencumbered for several miles, outflanked both the *Panzer Lehr* artillery and the remaining reserves of the regiment of the 275th Division at Marigny, and, at dawn, hastened the flight of a withdrawing enemy column. Some troops of the 30th Division moved easily into the loop of the Vire River while others cut the Canisy-St. Lô road.

Except on the extreme right flank of the VII Corps where the 330th Infantry was denied for the third day the crossroads on the Périers-St. Lô highway that constituted its original objective, developments after daylight on 27 July indicated that the infantry was nearing fulfillment of its COBRA aims. The 9th Division, in a regimental attack against some 200 Germans, who were on a small ridge and were supported by four tanks and several antitank guns, destroyed the bulk of this force and dispersed the re-

mainder.<sup>15</sup> The 4th Division sent its reconnaissance troop ahead to screen a rapid advance.<sup>16</sup> Strong resistance from enemy positions hastily erected during the night melted away. The 8th Infantry cut the Carantilly-Canisy road and proceeded to a point more than seven miles south of the Périers-St. Lô highway. To clear small pockets of bypassed Germans, General Barton committed portions of the 12th Infantry, which had been in division reserve since the commencement of COBRA. Contingents of the 30th Division moved all the way into the loop of the Vire River and established physical contact with the 35th Division at the St. Lô bridge. Other units secured the two Vire River bridges on the main roads south of St. Lô. General Hobbs committed his reserve regiment, the 120th, which drove south along the Vire River for almost six miles against little opposition.

"This thing has busted wide open," General Hobbs exulted. He was right. Evidence of German disintegration was plentiful. Some German soldiers were walking into command posts to surrender; others were fleeing south or across the Vire River.<sup>17</sup>

On the morning of 28 July, the 330th Infantry at last was able to move against virtually no resistance to rejoin its parent unit, the 83d Division. In the 9th Division sector, only an occasional round

<sup>14</sup> MS # P-159 (Stoeckler); MS # B-839 (Heydte); MS # B-439 (Ziegelmann).

<sup>15</sup> 4th Div Msg, 1015, 27 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>16</sup> Telecon, Hobbs and Birks, 2300, 27 Jul, 30th Div Jnl and File; 30th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 0725, 2033, and 2100, 27 Jul.