

adding its strength to the second attempt to gain Avranches.¹¹

The second effort was to have been made over the same terrain as the first, but this time with two corps moving abreast: the *XLVII Panzer Corps* (with four armored divisions—*1st SS*, *2d SS*, *2d*, and *116th*) and the *LVIII Panzer Corps* (with the *9th SS* and *10th SS Panzer Divisions*, as well as the Panther tank battalion of the *9th Panzer Division*). The attacking corps were to have been supported by two rocket brigades and reinforced later by the *12th SS Panzer* and *85th Infantry Divisions*.¹² Continued Allied pressure and the threats to the flanks made it necessary to divert an increasing number of elements designated for the attack to defensive missions. The *116th*, *2d SS*, and remnants of *Panzer Lehr* moved to the *LXXXIV Corps* to support the *363d* and *353d Divisions* between Vire and Sourdeval; the *LVIII Corps* (with the *10th SS Panzer Division*) was inserted at Barenton to relieve the weak *275th Division* (which moved to the *Fifteenth Army* area for reconstitution) and protect the long *2d SS Panzer Division* flank. The emphasis turned unmistakably to defense.

Despite postponement of the second attempt to drive toward Avranches and despite the fact that the *XLVII Panzer*

¹¹ MS # B-179 (Hausser) and MS # B-725 (Gersdorff) are basic sources for the following section. For a vivid account of the movement of the *331st Division* from the Pas-de-Calais—movement made difficult by Allied air attacks on rail lines—see Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946, p. 63.

¹² *Seventh Army Order, Ia Nr. 640/44*, 9 Aug., *LXXXI Corps Befehle H Gr u Armee*; Speidel's *Est of the Situation*, 1000, 9 Aug., *AGp B Operationsbefehle*.

Corps, basically the striking force, retained control over the *1st SS* and *2d Panzer Divisions*, the German commanders in Normandy felt that a renewed effort might still succeed if certain conditions were met: if the positions north of Falaise remained stable, if a strong defense could be established north of Alençon to protect the ammunition and gasoline dumps nearby, if the Panther battalion and a rocket brigade newly made available could be moved quickly to the *Seventh Army* sector, and if Eberbach, designated by Hitler to take command of the renewed effort toward Avranches, could have a few days in which to unscramble the assault forces and reassemble them for the attack.¹³

Hitler, who issued a new order that day, 9 August, was convinced that Eberbach could achieve success if he avoided the mistakes of the first attack, which Hitler considered to have been launched "too early, too weak, and in unfavorable weather." To insure proper timing, Hitler reserved for himself the designation of H Hour. Meanwhile, Eberbach was to prepare to attack southwest from the vicinity of Domfront, then northwest to the ultimate objective, Avranches. To protect Eberbach's left flank, *LXXXI Corps* was to follow the two assault corps echeloned to the left rear. Recognizing that Allied pressure had to be resisted particularly at Falaise, Hitler ordered sufficient antitank weapons, tanks, and assault guns, which were

¹³ Telecons, Kluge and Jodl, 1500, 9 Aug., and Buhle and Jodl, 2210, 9 Aug., *AGp B KTB*; Telecons Kluge and Gersdorff, 1520, 9 Aug., and Tempelhoff, Speidel, and Gersdorff, 1250, 9 Aug., *Seventh Army Tel Msgs*; *Seventh Army Est of the Situation*, 10 Aug., *Msg, AGp B to OB WEST*, 0200, 11 Aug., *AGp B Op. Befehle*, pp. 412-13; MS # B-445 (Krueger).

coming from the *Fifteenth Army* sector, diverted to the *I SS Panzer Corps* for a strong stand at Falaise. Elsewhere along the front, Hitler prohibited local counterattacks that might lead to serious personnel losses; he also authorized withdrawals to neutralize any penetrations the Allies might effect.¹⁴

Although some commanders later called Hitler's order "pure utopia" and not in keeping with the situation on the ground, the situation in the air, and the supply situation—"the apex of conduct by a command [OKW] ignorant of front line conditions, taking upon itself the right to judge the situation from East Prussia"—the commanders facing the crisis in Normandy reorganized for a renewed attempt.¹⁵ They planned to have the *LXXXIV Corps* pull the *116th Panzer Division* out of the front for assembly; they hoped to withdraw the *84th Division* to a shorter line east of Perriers-en-Beauficel; they instructed the *XLVII Panzer Corps* to withdraw the *2d Panzer Division* somewhat and pull out the *1st SS Panzer Division* for assembly. The *1st SS* and *116th Panzer Divisions* were then to be concentrated in forward assembly areas under *LVIII Panzer Corps* to provide impetus for the new attack. The *Seventh Army* also expected to receive the *9th Panzer Division*'s Panther battalion and two mortar (*werfer*) brigades to bolster the second effort. The new attack was to be launched, as Hitler wished, under Eberbach's command and from the Mortain-Domfront area toward St. Hilaire and eventually Avranches.

¹⁴ Telecon, Jodl and Blumentritt, 1745, 9 Aug, *OB WEST KTB*; Hitler Order, 2300, 9 Aug (WFSt/Op. Nr. 77280/44 g.Kdos. Chefs.), quoted in Msg from *AGp B* to the armies, 1130, 10 Aug, *AGp B Fuehrer Befehle*.

¹⁵ Quote is from MS # B-725 (Gersdorff).

Leaving command of the *Fifth Panzer Army* to Panzergeneraloberst Josef (Sepp) Dietrich, formerly the commander of the *I SS Panzer Corps*, Eberbach, somewhat against his will, took command of *Panzer Group Eberbach*. His headquarters, formed for the express purpose of making the second attack to Avranches on 11 August, was directly under *Army Group B*. Eberbach assembled a skeleton staff of great ability that included Lt. Col. Guenther von Kluge, the field marshal's son, as chief of staff, and Maj. Arthur von Eckesparre, formerly Rommel's G-4, as operations officer. The command was nevertheless deficient in personnel and equipment and could function only with the aid of the *Seventh Army* staff or a corps headquarters. Despite these handicaps and the additional one of Eberbach's pessimism, the provisional headquarters began to plan the attack in detail.¹⁶

It did not take Eberbach long to conclude that he could not attack on 11 August. He felt that he would probably have to commit part of his attack forces to protect his assembly areas and thus would not be able to assemble his troops by that date. Judging that only 77 Mark IV and 47 Panther tanks were available for the attack, he wanted more. He also requested vehicle replacements and additional ammunition and POL supplies. All this would take time. Most important, however, Eberbach believed that because of Allied air superiority he could attack only after dark and in early morning when ground fog might provide concealment. At best, his movements would be restricted to the six

¹⁶ Msg, *AGp B* to *OB WEST* and *Seventh Army*, 1815, 9 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; see *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, p. 132; MS # A-922 (Eberbach).

hours between 0400 and 1000. If his assault forces failed to reach their objective during that period, the events at Mortain would be repeated—his troops would be smashed by Allied air and artillery. To attack after nightfall, he needed the light of the waning moon, not to be had until 20 August. At that time also, according to meteorologists, the weather would change and become unfavorable for aerial activity. Thus 20 August, not 11 August, in Eberbach's estimation, was the best date for launching the new attack toward Avranches.¹⁷

While Eberbach was coming to his conclusions, a new threat developed. Just as it appeared that the Canadian attack on the north flank was halted, the Americans on the south flank "unmistakably swerved" north from le Mans toward Alençon. As Kluge evaluated the situation on the evening of 10 August, if the changed direction of the XV Corps drive was connected with the Canadian effort toward Falaise, he faced the threat of double envelopment. Furthermore, the weak forces of the LXXXI Corps could not possibly protect the army group on the southern flank. Nor could the LXXXI Corps keep the vital Alençon–Flers line open. Instead of continuing the attack toward Avranches, Kluge thought it "worth considering whether the spearheads of the enemy columns driving north should not be smashed by a . . . swiftly executed panzer thrust." He requested Jodl to get a decision on this matter from Hitler.¹⁸

Hitler replied with queries. He

wanted clarification on why Eberbach could not mount his attack toward Avranches before 20 August. He wanted to know what Funck, the commander of the XLVII Panzer Corps, thought of resuming that attack. Hitler interpreted Kluge's suggestion as meaning an attack to regain le Mans and asked when, with what forces, and from where such an attack could be launched. Finally, he asked when the 11th Panzer Division, if he ordered it moved from southern France, could reach the Loire River near Tours so that it could support an attack on le Mans—for if another attack toward Avranches could not be mounted before 20 August, Hitler conceded, an attack against the U.S. XV Corps "must perforce be carried out before that time."¹⁹

Before he answered Hitler's questions, Kluge phoned Eberbach. The commanders were in agreement that a new attempt to gain Avranches was out of the question, at least for the moment. The obstacles to a renewed drive toward Avranches were not only the strong opposition at Mortain and the unrelaxed pressure elsewhere along the front but also the uncomfortable thought that the Canadians attacking south toward Falaise and the Americans attacking north toward Alençon seemed to be converging on a common point. If the Allied forces joined, the major part of the German forces would be encircled. The Canadian and American spearheads had to be blunted immediately, and since the Canadians were apparently stopped, action ought to be taken against the Ameri-

¹⁷ Pz Gp Eberbach Ltr, Ia Nr. 2/44 g.Kdos., 10 Aug, OB WEST, *Analgen*, Incl to Annex 1458.

¹⁸ Kluge to Jodl, 10 Aug, AGp B *Lagebeurteilungen*, *Wochenmeldungen*.

¹⁹ Telecon, Blumentritt and Speidel, 0200, 11 Aug, AGp B KTB.

cans, who threatened the vital supply installations around Alençon.²⁰

Kluge informed Hitler to this effect an hour and a half later. All commanders agreed, Kluge said, that the prospect of continuing the attack to Avranches was unfavorable because the enemy had reinforced, surprise had been lost, and the attacking force needed time to bring forward more troops, tanks, gasoline, and ammunition, and required certain weather conditions. There was no possibility of fulfilling the necessary preattack requirements within a few days. As for an attack against the XV Corps, Kluge would need at least two of the best panzer divisions, which he envisioned attacking from the vicinity of Alençon. The direction of the attack would depend on developments. He hoped to make his approach march during the night of 11 August and attack on 13 August with the hope of completing the operation three days later. The *11th Panzer Division* in southern France could not reach the area of operations in time to lend support.²¹

Kluge was again in touch with Hitler's headquarters at noon on 11 August. He had conferred with Hausser and Eberbach, and all three commanders were convinced that an attack on Avranches had no prospect of success. The situation on the extreme southern flank of the army group was deteriorating so rapidly—the *9th Panzer Division*, for example, was fighting near Alençon with its back close to vital supply installations—that immediate measures had to

be taken in that area. Kluge needed more armor there. The only practical way to get armor was to pull three divisions out of the line—the *116th* that night, the *1st SS* and *2d Panzer Divisions* during the following night. These units could be released only if the *Seventh Army* salient at Mortain were reduced by withdrawal to the east. This meant abandoning hope of a breakthrough to the sea at Avranches. A clear-cut decision had to be made at once. In Kluge's mind, the decision could be only one thing: attack the XV Corps in the vicinity of Alençon with panzer divisions pulled out of the line and bring additional infantry divisions forward to launch an attack against the XV Corps from east to west, thus stabilizing the situation on the army group left flank.²²

After further discussion with Jodl in midafternoon, Kluge issued a written report to Hitler and disseminated it to his subordinate commands, probably as a warning order subject to Hitler's approval. In this report, Kluge projected the following actions. The *Seventh Army* was to withdraw its Mortain salient that night. An attack force—composed of the *XLVII Panzer* and *LXXXI Corps* headquarters, the *1st SS*, *2d*, and *116th Panzer Divisions*, two *werfer* brigades, and possibly an additional panzer division—was to assemble in the Carrouges area and prepare to attack during the early morning hours of 14 August, one day later than Kluge had originally contemplated. The attack, with three divisions abreast, was to be launched in a southeasterly direction

²⁰ Telecon, Kluge and Eberbach, 0315, 11 Aug, AGp B KTB; Kluge's Est of the Situation, 10 Aug, AGp B *Lagebeurteilungen, Wochenmeldungen*.

²¹ Telecon, Kluge and Jodl, 0445, 11 Aug, AGp B *Lagebeurteilungen, Wochenmeldungen*.

²² Telecon, Kluge and Jodl, 11 Aug, AGp B *Lagebeurteilungen, Wochenmeldungen*.

along the Lalacelle-la Hutte axis—generally a thrust starting northwest of Alençon and cutting across the le Mans—Alençon road.²³

Hitler's response to Kluge's report reached *Army Group B* headquarters late that evening. Acknowledging the new set of circumstances that had come into being, Hitler, though reiterating his intention to attack westward to the sea (this time by way of Mayenne), admitted that "the serious threat to the deep southern flank" of the army group required quick action. He therefore approved Kluge's plan to have Eberbach launch an attack with an armored corps from the vicinity of Carrouges. But instead of an effort envisaged by Kluge as an attempt to destroy the American spearheads driving north toward Alençon, Hitler envisioned an attack against the deep west flank of the U.S. XV Corps, the axis of the thrust passing in a more southerly direction across the Sillé-le-Guillaume-Beaumont road. In order to disengage the necessary forces, Hitler agreed to "a minor withdrawal of the front between Sourdeval and Mortain." He retained the 11th Panzer Division in southern France as the only mobile reserve in the Nineteenth Army sector because Kluge assured him that it could not reach the Normandy front in time to attack near Alençon, and perhaps because he was apprehensive over the imminent Allied invasion of southern France.²⁴

Thus, while the Germans awaited rein-

²³ Msg, Kluge to Jodl (info to subordinate comds), 1745, 11 Aug, *AGp B Lagebeurteilungen, Wochenmeldungen*.

²⁴ Hitler Order, *WFSt/Op. Nr. 772830/44, g.Kdos. Chefs.*, 11 Aug, quoted in *AGp B* Msg to the armies, 0030, 12 Aug, *AGp B Fuehrer Befehle*.

forcements and favorable weather for another try at Avranches in compliance with Hitler's wishes, Eberbach was to make an effort to eradicate the American threat to Alençon. To make this possible, the *Seventh Army* during the night of 11 August began to withdraw eastward from Mortain.²⁵

The Battle at Mortain

The German withdrawal from Mortain on the night of 11 August brought the battle that had been raging there to an end. Until that time, although the Americans could mark an increasing improvement in their situation about Mortain, no decisive result had been achieved.

General Hobbs, for example, had been variously elated and depressed. "We are holding and getting in better shape all the time," he informed General Collins on 8 August. "It was precarious for a while . . . [but] we are doing everything in God's power to hold." Yet on the following day, when Hobbs wondered aloud whether his positions might be "practically untenable," Collins flared in exasperation: "Stop talking about untenable."²⁶

Essentially, the battle was small unit combat, "infiltration and counter infiltration," close-range fighting by splinter groups maneuvering to outflank, and in turn being outflanked, "a seesawing activity consisting of minor penetrations by both sides," operations characterized by ambush and surprise and fought on a level often no higher than that of the

²⁵ See MS # A-918 (Gersdorff); *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, p. 57.

²⁶ Telecons, Collins and Hobbs, 1220, 8 Aug, and 2307, 9 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

individual soldier. "What does the situation look like down there?" the 30th Division G-3 asked a regimental officer. "Looks like hell," came the reply. "We are just mingled in one big mess, our CP is getting all kinds of fire, tanks within 500 yards of us."²⁷

Though the Germans had been stopped on the first day of their attack, their retention of the ground gained represented a distinct challenge, particularly to the 30th Division, to expel them. In General Hobbs's words, it was a matter of "trying to plug up these rat holes."²⁸ The rats were dangerous, as was indicated by the fact that the division's lines changed but little for four days.

The first improvement occurred on 8 August, when the attached CCB of the 3d Armored Division and the 119th Infantry, after combining forces, made physical contact with the 4th Division several miles west of Chérencé and thereby blocked the possibility of unopposed further westward movement by the Germans along the south bank of the Sée. The death of Col. William W. Cornog, Jr., a CCB task force commander killed by an enemy shell on 9 August, temporarily disrupted efforts to eject the Germans from le Mesnil-Tôve, but after hard fighting on 10 and 11 August the armor and infantry regained the village and re-established contact with the 39th Infantry at Chérencé. On 12 August the 117th Infantry, on the immediate right, re-entered the



SCURRYING ALONG A HEDGEROW in the Mortain area.

smoking pile of rubble that was St. Barthélémy. The American lines north of Mortain were thus restored to the positions held before the counterattack.

In the sector south of Mortain, the 35th Division had had a difficult assignment in advancing through St. Hilaire to the Mortain-Barenton road. Two regiments had initially attacked abreast, but small counterattacks split unit formations repeatedly. General Baade, the division commander, committed his reserve regiment on 9 August, and all three attacking abreast made liberal use of tank and artillery fire. Unit commanders also formed "killing parties" to clear Germans out of the paths of advance. Still Baade was not satisfied with the progress, and though he exerted pressure to get the division moving for-

²⁷ FUSA G-2 Jnl, entries 0215, 9 Aug, and 1700, 11 Aug; Hassenfelt Telecon, 0520, 8 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

²⁸ Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 1044, 9 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; see also 30th Div Ltr of Instrs, 2230, 9 Aug.



ANTIAIRCRAFT POSITION *near St. Hilaire.*

ward aggressively, it took the 35th Division four days and more than seven hundred casualties to cover eight miles.²⁹

The Germans withdrew from their positions southwest of Mortain and released their hold on Romagny on 11 August as the 35th Division reached the Mortain-Barenton road. General Baade then prepared to assault the south slope of Hill 317 to relieve the isolated battalion of the 30th Division on the crest. At noon, 12 August, after having moved up the south slope of the hill, troops of the 35th Division made contact with the battalion. Minutes later, the 120th In-

²⁹ 35th Div AAR, Aug, and G-3 Per Rpt 55, 8 Aug; VII Corps Msg, 8 Aug (recording 35th Div Radio Msg, 1517, 8 Aug); Telecons, Hobbs and Baade, 2225, 11 Aug, and 1255, 12 Aug, and Gen Hobbs, Col Howard S. Searle, and Gen Collins, 1021, 8 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; FUSA Daily G-1 Estimated Losses, Aug.

fantry, 30th Division, re-entered Mortain and relieved the men on the hill.³⁰

The fact that the 2d Battalion, 120th Infantry, had retained possession of the top of Hill 317 during the battle of Mortain was one of the outstanding small unit achievements in the course of the campaign in western Europe. The battalion command post in Mortain had been overrun early on 7 August, and the command group had been captured on the following morning as the officers endeavored to reach their troops on the hill. Under the leadership of Capt. Reynold C. Erichson, who assumed command of the surrounded force, the troops on the hill for five days denied the Germans possession of terrain that would have given them observation over the major part of the VII Corps sector. Like Erichson, Capt. Delmont K. Byrn, who directed the heavy weapons company, and 1st Lts. Ralph A. Kerley, Joseph C. Reaser, and Ronald E. Woody, Jr., who commanded the rifle companies, refused to surrender.³¹ They were fortunate in having with them two forward observers of the 230th Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Lt. Charles A. Barts and 2d Lt. Robert L. Weiss, who brought accurate fire not only on the Germans assaulting the hill positions but also on other German units within sight of the crest.³²

Under almost constant attack (the regimental-sized 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division under control of the 2d SS

³⁰ On the damage to Mortain, see Leon Blouet, *Mortain en Flammes* (Mortain, 1951).

³¹ Erichson, Byrn, Kerley, Reaser, and Woody received the DSC for their leadership on Hill 317.

³² Hewitt, *Story of 30th Division*, pp. 70-71; *History of the 120th Infantry Regiment* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), pp. 46-56.

Panzer Division had had the mission of seizing Hill 317), the troops on the hill had captured several prisoners; though they needed radio batteries, food, and medical supplies, they were "Not too worried about situation as long as [friendly] artillery fire continues." After two days of isolation, they still "didn't seem to be worried."³³ If the men were not overly concerned about their situation, General Hobbs was. While waiting for the 35th Division to advance and relieve the pressure, he maintained a ring of artillery fire around the hill.³⁴

It was not long before the 30th Division did more. On 9 August, two light artillery planes tried to drop supplies by parachute, but German flak drove them away. C-47 cargo planes did somewhat better on the afternoon of 10 August, dropping two days supply of food and ammunition, though half fell outside the defensive perimeter. Another drop on the following day was less successful.³⁵

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Lewis D. Vieman, commander of the 230th Field Artillery Battalion, conceived the idea of sending supplies by shell. Using smoke shell cases normally employed for propaganda leaflets, the battalion fired bandages, adhesive tape, morphine, and other medical supplies onto the hill. The first of the supply shoots occurred on the evening of 10 August, and eventually

³³ Telecon, Hobbs and Ellis, 2135, 9 Aug, and entry 2246, 8 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; MS # B-725 (Gersdorff).

³⁴ See Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 2307, 9 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

³⁵ Maj. William K. C. Collonan of the First Army G-4 Section had reconnoitered Hill 317 as a passenger in a light plane on 9 August in order to arrange for cargo drops. The plane was struck by flak, and Major Collonan parachuted and fell into enemy lines. He was awarded the DSC.



THROUGH THE RUBBLE OF MORTAIN

105-mm. assault guns of the 743d Tank Battalion and 155-mm. howitzers of the 113th Field Artillery Battalion participated in the effort. Although it was impossible to propel blood plasma, which was badly needed on the hill, the other supplies helped morale considerably.³⁶

Fed by French farmers who shared with the soldiers their chickens, vegetables, and the common danger, nearly seven hundred men held out.³⁷ By 12 August three hundred men had been killed or wounded, but more than three hundred walked off the hill unharmed. During the battle of Mortain they had been a "thorn in the flesh" that had

³⁶ See Hewitt, *Story of 30th Division*, pp. 69-75, for a detailed account.

³⁷ See Jules and Gilles Buisson, *Mortain et sa Bataille*; also their "Les Combats de Mortain," in Herval, *Bataille de Normandie*, I, 219-42.

paralyzed all German movements in the area.³⁸

The 2d Armored Division had made a similar contribution by attacking northeast from Barenton toward Ger into the German left flank and rear. Employing the small task force of the 3d Armored Division's CCA and the battalion of the 30th Division already near Barenton, the 2d Armored Division had attacked on 8 August and advanced three miles into the broken terrain of the Mortain forest. Although stiffening opposition had prevented capture of Ger, the armored division had kept a spear sticking into the enemy flank for four more days, a constant threat hampering German communications between Tinchebray and Sourdeval, disrupting forward assembly areas between Sourdeval and Ger, and forcing commitment of the 10th SS *Panzer Division* elsewhere than toward Avranches.³⁹

On 12 August, with the 35th Division beyond the Mortain-Barenton road and the 30th Division again in possession of St. Barthélémy and Mortain, the costly battle came to an end. The 30th Division alone had lost almost two thousand men in six days. The 9th Division, fighting on the fringe of the Mortain action, had sustained nearly a thousand casualties in closing the gap that had separated the division from the 39th Infantry. In protecting the Sée River line, the 4th Division, which had contributed a regiment each to the 9th and 30th

³⁸ MS # B-445 (Krueger).

³⁹ For heroism on 8 August, 2d Lt. Glenn H. Warren of the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion received the DSC. Capt. Thomas F. Carothers and Pvt. William J. Draper of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment received the DSC for heroism from 9 to 14 August and on 11 August, respectively.

Divisions, had sustained about six hundred casualties.⁴⁰

As heavy as American casualties were, German losses were greater. The effect of artillery and air power had been particularly telling. One regiment of the 2d *Panzer Division* had been annihilated near le Mesnil-Tôve. The 1st SS *Panzer Division* had had especially heavy tank losses. The 2d SS *Panzer Division* had been slashed by artillery fire called from Hill 317, by tank fire from the 2d Armored Division near Barenton, and by air attacks that had seemed particularly effective in its sector. Allied tactical aircraft, somewhat hampered by early morning haze, flew from midmorning to darkness, while Brig. Gen. James M. Lewis, the 30th Division Artillery commander, alone massed more than twelve battalions of artillery to achieve devastating results. Between 1900 and 2000, 9 August, the 30th Division Artillery, for example, fired thirty observed and fully adjusted counterbattery missions, an imposing total for an hour's activity and one that was later claimed as a record. Observation was excellent from both the ground and the air, and artillerymen and pilots "just plaster [ed the enemy] . . . all along the line." Close to a hundred German tanks lay abandoned in the Mortain sector at the close of the battle.⁴¹

⁴⁰ VII Corps, 2d Armd Div, 4th, 9th, and 30th Div AAR's, Aug; Msgs, Brooks to Collins, 0830 and 0907, 8 Aug; VII Corps G-3 Jnl and File; VII Corps Ops Memo 60, 8 Aug (confirming oral orders, 7 Aug); Collins' Talk at the Armored School, 19 Jan 48.

⁴¹ CI 96, 30th Div, 6-12 Aug; 30th Div FO 22, 1230, 9 Aug; Telecons, Gen Hobbs and Col Otto Ellis, 0823, 8 Aug, and Hobbs and Lewis, 1715, 7 Aug, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; Hewitt, *Story of 30th Division*, p. 77; MS # B-725 (Gersdorff).



WRECKED GERMAN ARMOR IN THE SOURDEVAL AREA

At the outset of the attack, American officers had estimated that the enemy seemed capable of driving a wedge to Avranches "to rupture" the front and make the position of the forces south of Avranches "logistically untenable." It was not long, however, before the "potential threat of a major counterattack" vanished. The enemy had very quickly "been forced to abandon his ambitious effort . . . because of heavy tank casualties from allied air attacks . . . and artillery fire." As early as 8 August, intelligence officers were optimistically considering what the Germans might do after the current attack was defeated or contained.⁴²

⁴² TUSA G-2 Per Rpt 59, 9 Aug; FUSA G-2 Per Rpts 60, 61, and 64, 9, 10, and 13 Aug, and G-2 Est 14, 8 Aug; VII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 64, 8 Aug.

The only effect of the Mortain counterattack was that it had "practically stopped the VII Corps advance." Beyond that, it had prompted some readjustment of forces in the Mortain-Avranches area, but the rearrangement of units had no more than local significance. What the counterattack might have accomplished seemed in retrospect to have been its only merit. Even had it succeeded in cutting the supply lines to the Allied forces south of Avranches, SHAEF was prepared to supply those forces with two thousand tons per day by air.⁴³

Taken by surprise in newly occupied

⁴³ VII Corps and FUSA AAR's, Aug; Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, "Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions," *Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 218, No. 50 (June 15, 1946), 18.