



A POLISH SOLDIER (left) and an American officer confer near Chambois.

St. Lambert, almost midway between Trun and Chambois, but the rest of the river line between Trun and Chambois was covered only by a few outposts and some roving patrols of Canadian and Polish reconnaissance units.

Two main highways run to the northeast from the river, one from Trun, the other from Chambois—both leading to Vimoutiers. The highway from Trun was definitely in Allied hands. The other, from Chambois across the Mt. Ormel ridge, was blocked by Allied troops at two places—at Chambois and at Mt. Ormel. Between the highways coming together at Vimoutiers are many smaller roads and country lanes. Several of these secondary routes converge near Coudehard, a village on the western slope of Mt. Ormel.

Not far from Coudehard, on the north-

ern eminence of Mt. Ormel, is the fifteenth-century Château Boisjos, which had witnessed a decisive battle during the Hundred Years' War.²⁷ It was about to witness the climactic action in the battle of Normandy.

The German Breakout

Hausser, *Seventh Army* commander and in charge of the encircled forces, arrived with a small staff after dark on 19 August at the *II Parachute Corps* command post.²⁸ There Meindl, the corps commander, was making his final preparations for the breakout. In order to be able to handle the situation promptly as it developed, Meindl chose his place behind the forward elements of the left column of the *3d Parachute Division*. Hausser also elected to break out with the paratroopers.

Unit commanders and noncommissioned officers of the division had been thoroughly briefed. The men had slept for a few hours and had eaten. No one underestimated the difficulty of the undertaking, but weariness seemed to have vanished and the troops appeared in good spirits.

The forward elements moved from the line of departure at la Londe at 2230. Forty-five minutes later Meindl's column drew fire from a tank near the Trun-Argentan highway. Two more encounters with Allied outposts occurred before the paratroopers, around 0030 on 20

²⁷ See Rousseau, *Bataille de Normandie*, p. 131.

²⁸ The scarcity of official German records has made it necessary to depend almost entirely on the recollections, as noted below, of some of the German commanders who were participants and who later tried to reconstruct the sequence of events of the breakout.

August, reached the Dives River. Because the division commander, General-leutenant Richard Schimpf, was seriously wounded in the last encounter, Meindl himself assumed command of the *3d Parachute Division*.²⁹

Bypassing Allied-held points had delayed progress and broken contact among units and along the chain of command. Thus when Meindl reached the Dives somewhere between Magny and St. Lambert, he had with him only twenty paratroopers and Hausser's small command group. As he searched for a suitable crossing site, Meindl came upon one of his regimental commanders, who told him of a ford, about a mile southeast of Magny, where the water was about five feet deep.

To move a large body of men across the river and maintain silence in close proximity to enemy forces was no easy task. The opposite bank was covered with dense underbrush, and it rose steeply toward a hill, where three enemy tanks stood silhouetted against the sky. There was no time to lose if the troops were to get out of the pocket before daylight. Having gathered a larger group about him, Meindl took the lead and set off to the southeast, crossed the river about half a mile downstream from St. Lambert, went around the hill

²⁹ On 14 August Schimpf had issued a message to his paratroopers as follows: "False rumors are the same as bad odors—both come from the rear. . . . contrary to all rumors . . . there is no need to worry that the division might be encircled and cut off from its supply lines. . . . Even if the enemy should ever succeed temporarily in interrupting our supply routes, this would be no reason for a paratrooper, who is specially trained to jump into the midst of the enemy, to feel depressed. . . . He who thinks or talks otherwise will be slapped across the mouth." VII Corps G-2 Per Rpt 79, 23 Aug.

crowned by tanks, and ran head on into machine gun fire from a concealed tank thirty yards away. Meindl and the few men around him hit the ground, while those in the immediate rear rushed to the protection of the dead angle of the hill. Aroused by the commotion, other tanks in the vicinity opened fire. Trajectories were high, and none of the paratroopers was hurt. At about the same time wild musketry fire flared up on the right rear near St. Lambert, where the *353d Division* was supposed to be crossing the river.

According to Meindl, the liberal use of tracer bullets by the Allies was quite helpful in revealing gaps in their lines through which the paratroopers were able to infiltrate. On the other hand, the Very lights were a great nuisance. Drifting leisurely to the ground, they illuminated large areas, froze all movement, and delayed progress considerably.

Meindl's group, reduced to about fifteen men, worked its way out of the field of tank fire by crawling along a furrow in the ground. The men continued eastward, deflected from time to time by hostile tanks. As the sky began to pale, they were still only half way to their objective, the hill mass of Mt. Ormel near Coudehard. The fire fight at St. Lambert had subsided, but another broke out in the left rear, in the direction of Neauphe-sur-Dives, where Meindl thought his rear-guard regiment was likely to be. A drizzling rain set in. The dim diffused morning light seemed oppressive. The exertion of the past hours suddenly began to tell. The men felt very tired.

They continued nevertheless to work their way eastward, picking up strag-

glers and small groups of men along the way. By the time there was enough light to distinguish the main features of the landscape, they found themselves less than a mile west of the northern hill of the Mt. Ormel ridge. This was Meindl's objective, but it was not long before he realized that it was already in Allied hands and that the encircling ring was much deeper than he had anticipated.³⁰

The Allied troops on Mt. Ormel were that part of the 1st Polish Armored Division that had advanced to the ridge on 19 August and by nightfall had occupied a defensive perimeter on the northern extremity, Hill 262 just north of the Chambois-Vimoutiers highway.³¹ Two infantry battalions and a tank regiment deployed along the ridge line facing westward; the third infantry battalion and the other tank regiment guarded the approaches to the hill from the north and east. There were about 1,500 infantrymen, approximately 80 tanks.

No supplies had reached the Poles by evening of 19 August and at 0200, 20 August, it was established that Germans were astride the roads to their rear. Throughout the night they heard the rumble of traffic moving toward Vimoutiers; reconnaissance reported Germans digging in along the Chambois-Vimoutiers road. Nevertheless, apart from a few concentrations of harassing mortar fire on the southern part of the perimeter, the night passed uneventfully.

In the morning a task force moved out to secure the southern part of the Ormel

ridge, a move that soon had to be canceled as heavy enemy pressure began to develop against the northern sector of the Polish perimeter.

When the morning mist lifted, almost the whole plain to the west came into Polish view. The ground was covered with German columns moving to the northeast in dispersed formations on the roads and cross-country.

While Polish guns were taking profitable targets under fire, a German attack, the first of several that day, struck the northeastern part of the perimeter at 0900. The attack was beaten off by 1030. In the meantime, German tanks had been observed around 1000 moving from the direction of Champsoult toward Hill 239, less than two miles north of the Polish perimeter. A detachment dispatched to deny the Germans possession of the hill, from which they could enfilade the Polish position, was unable to accomplish its mission. About an hour later gun fire from the direction of Hill 239 struck the Poles on Hill 262. Very quickly the Poles lost five tanks and a number of killed and wounded.

The German units involved in both of these actions belonged to the 2d SS *Panzer Division* of the II SS *Panzer Corps*. The mission of the corps, which had earlier assembled in the Vimoutiers area, was to assist the *Seventh Army* breakout by an attack with two divisions in a southeasterly direction toward the Trun-Chambois line. The 9th SS *Panzer Division* on the right advanced toward Trun, the 2d SS on the left toward Chambois. Both divisions had been "utterly torn asunder" by previous night marches and air attacks. Together they had perhaps twenty tanks; their infantry

³⁰ MS # A-923 (Meindl).

³¹ The account of Polish action is based on the 1st Polish Armored Division, pp. 110-16.

consisted of about the equivalent of three battalions. They had few communications facilities. Roads were "so packed with burned out vehicles" that tanks had "to clear an alley before passing." Yet Allied aircraft were not overhead, for the weather was bad, just as the meteorologists had predicted for this day, the date that Eberbach so long ago had thought he could attack again toward Avranches. The *9th SS Panzer Division* bogged down near Champosoult and played a passive role for the rest of the day, but the *2d SS* actively engaged the Poles on Mt. Ormel and thereby made a significant contribution to the *Seventh Army* breakout.³²

When the first German attack struck the Polish perimeter, Meindl was northwest of Coudehard, not far from the place he had reached at dawn. He was immobilized there for a considerable time, first by an encounter with Polish tanks, later by a heavy concentration of Allied fire on the entire Coudehard area. Around 0600, Meindl saw behind him a paratroop unit charging headlong into Polish fire from Hill 262. He stopped the attack, admonished the captain in command for his reckless behavior, oriented him on the situation around Hill 262, and pointed out the possibility of outflanking the hill from the north. Learning from the captain the whereabouts of Hausser, Meindl turned over to the captain's command the men who had joined him during the night, a considerable number by then, and set out to find Hausser.

Retracing his steps to the west, then turning south, then east, chased by artillery fire part of the way, Meindl found the army commander southwest of Coudehard about noontime. In an old bomb crater—the area was under artillery fire—they discussed the situation. Meindl reported his intention of attacking Hill 262 from the north and learned from Hausser that a panzer division had reached the Mt. Ormel area and was preparing to attack the ridge. Hausser intended to join this division for the final breakout. He told Meindl to make every effort to open the way for the remaining divisions. Despite the extreme exhaustion of his men, Meindl expressed confidence that they would make it, though probably not before evening. By this time a large number of troops and two tanks had joined his attack force.

While Meindl was conferring with Hausser, an impressive volume of German artillery and mortar fire, especially the latter, began to fall on the Polish positions on Mt. Ormel. About two hours later the Germans launched a series of determined, but apparently un-coordinated, attacks against the perimeter. Lasting through the afternoon, the attacks struck for the most part against the northern and southern sectors of the Polish positions. The climax of the battle came about 1700, when German infantry supported by tanks broke into the northeastern part of the perimeter. The attack was finally beaten off by the combined efforts of infantrymen, tankers, and men of a mortar platoon acting as riflemen after they had expended their mortar ammunition. Another deep penetration occurred at the junction of two Polish infantry bat-

³² MS # P-162 (Harzer); MS # P-159 (Stueckler and Wisliceny); MS # A-922 (Eberbach); see also *AGp B Tagesmeldung*, 20 Aug, dated 0155, 21 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

talions near the Chambois-Vimoutiers highway. Not until about 1900 was this last German thrust contained and the penetration sealed off.

These attacks, by elements of the 2d SS *Panzer Division*, Meindl's paratroopers, and unidentifiable units, had the apparent effect by late afternoon of 20 August of compressing the Polish perimeter to the extent where the Poles were no longer able to control some of the vital German escape roads in the vicinity of Hill 262.³³

With the road to Champosoult opened, Meindl's next concern was to get the seriously wounded to safety. He organized a column of vehicles loaded with wounded and marked with Red Cross flags. To make the appearance of this column conspicuous and to convey his intention to the Allies, Meindl stopped all traffic on the road for fifteen minutes. Then the vehicles carrying the wounded moved out in close formation. The Allies understood the message. As the Red Cross convoy emerged on the road all artillery fire ceased. "Not a shot was fired on the column," Meindl wrote later, "and I can openly acknowledge the feeling of gratitude to the chivalrous enemy. . . ." Half an hour later, after the Red Cross flags had disappeared into the distance, traffic resumed and Allied artillery fire opened up once more.

News of the breakthrough at Coudehard spread to the rear like wildfire

and a multitude of stragglers poured through the opening until late into the night. Meindl established a command post near a crossroad on the Coudehard-Champosoult road, not far from the nose of Hill 262. Shortly after midnight part of the rear-guard regiment of the 3d *Parachute Division* arrived, and Meindl passed to the regimental commander the other elements of the division nearby. Meanwhile, a heavy rain had begun to fall. Traffic on the road gradually thinned out, then ceased completely. Finally, an armored reconnaissance battalion, the rear guard of a panzer division, came by and reported nothing was following behind it.

Estimating that he could not keep the breach open during the coming day, Meindl decided to start before dawn of 21 August. Anxious to insure movement at the proper time, he kept vigil while his exhausted men slept despite the heavy rainfall—except a few outposts that Meindl thought "could also have been asleep."

After the fury of the German attacks had subsided, the Poles remained in firm control of Hill 262, but their situation was serious. Shortages of ammunition and gasoline were becoming acute. About 300 wounded were lying in the open under enemy fire without adequate medical care. The presence of some 800 prisoners inside the small perimeter was a problem. Hope that 4th Canadian Armoured Division elements would bring badly needed supplies and open the road to the rear so that the wounded and prisoners could be evacuated was not fulfilled. The Canadians themselves were busily engaged a few miles to the northwest. No help reached the Poles

³³ Meindl states that the attack on the "hill east of Coudehard had succeeded" by 1630 and that by 1700 German vehicles had begun to roll along the "curving road from Coudehard to the east." These times correspond quite well with the time of the full-scale German attack described in the Polish narrative.

that day, and when night came their perimeter formed a small island in a broad stream of escaping Germans.

Escape

Meindl's leadership was without doubt one of the significant actions of the German breakout, perhaps the focal incident. Other commanders and other units had also contributed to the final, though only partially successful, outcome of the operation. Their activities during the twenty-four hours following the arrival of darkness on 19 August were diverse, illustrating clearly the nature and the complexity of the event.

The 353d Division, under General-leutenant Paul Mahlmann, had also executed a breakout attack as part of the II Parachute Corps effort. Assembled on the evening of 19 August in woods near Vorché, six miles west of the Dives, the division started its movement at nightfall. Meindl had instructed Mahlmann to make his main effort at St. Lambert on the left, while sending his vehicles through Chambois. A little later Mahlmann received information that both localities were in Allied hands. He therefore decided to make his main thrust across the Dives in the Chambois area to try to save his vehicles.

At Tournai-sur-Dives, about halfway to the river, the division came to a halt. The village was burning and its streets were blocked by wrecked vehicles, dead horses, and abandoned tanks. The terrain around Tournai did not permit bypassing the village, so a passage had to be cleared. This took three hours. Though the area lay under harassing artillery fire, the division suffered no losses from it.

Shortly before dawn Mahlmann, in the column on the right, was approaching Chambois. He made contact with a group of tanks, which, according to the officer in charge, had the mission of cleaning the enemy out of the Chambois area. But because this appeared impossible, the tank commander decided to cross the Dives River at Moissy. The tanks moved out around daybreak. Mahlmann and his column, along with stragglers from other units who had joined, followed them closely across the river. The tanks continued through Moissy and disappeared into the distance. Shortly afterward Allied tanks appeared in the vicinity and closed the gap. Their appearance was followed by an intense concentration of Allied artillery fire on the village jammed with German troops. Losses were high, and all semblance of organization vanished.

Mahlmann finally succeeded in bringing some order out of chaos. He organized a breakout attempt with the help of two stray tanks found in the village. The tanks had barely left the village when Allied fire knocked them out. Again, disorganization and apathy set in—spent, dispirited, resigned to their fate, men huddled under whatever cover they could find.

Taking a dozen stouthearted fellows, Mahlmann reconnoitered a concealed road leading to the east, receiving a light head wound in the process. The road enabled Mahlmann to get at least part of the men in Moissy out. Most of the wounded had to be left. All guns and vehicles, except two or three amphibious jeeps, along with part of the division staff, were lost.

Mahlmann headed for the southern eminence of Mt. Ormel, and that after-

noon he and those who accompanied him began to climb the western slope of the hill. The whole area seemed covered with an amorphous mass of German soldiers hastening toward the ridge. An American observation plane circled leisurely, seeming to hang in the sky, as it directed artillery fire on the retreating troops.

As he approached his objective, Mahlmann faced a situation quite different from that which had confronted the *3d Parachute Division* on his left. German pressure on the northern part of Ormel had forced the Poles to call off their advance to Hill 262 (south) in the morning. Thus Mahlmann was able to occupy his objective without opposition.

There Mahlmann organized three combat groups and deployed them along the ridge line facing west, one composed of SS men on the right, another of men of his own division on the left, and the third of paratroopers in reserve. His efforts to establish contact with units on the flanks and with higher headquarters were unsuccessful.

Late in the afternoon, when the SS group reported hostile reconnaissance units on the north flank, Mahlmann decided to fall back three miles to the east to a new line behind the Vie River. He accomplished his withdrawal without undue interference, and that evening infantrymen and paratroopers occupied the new position. The SS group, disobeying orders, continued to move eastward and vanished.

Soon afterward Mahlmann made personal contact with *Seventh Army* headquarters and received instructions to remain on the Vie until the next day,

when his division would be pulled back and sent to the rear for rehabilitation.³⁴

Like Meindl's paratroop corps for the north flank, the *XLVII Panzer Corps* had the task of opening the way for the surrounded forces on the southern flank.³⁵ Funck's *XLVII Panzer Corps* had the *1st SS* and *2d Panzer Divisions* (probably the *10th SS Panzer Division* also) assembled in the Forêt de Gouffern, the *116th Panzer Division* holding a long thin line practically from Argentan to the Dives. The corps was to cross the river in the St. Lambert-Chambois area, with the *116th* covering the rear.

The corps breakout order did not reach the *2d Panzer Division* commander, Generalleutnant Freiherr Heinrich von Luettwitz, until around 1900, 19 August. Because reconnaissance revealed the roads so clogged with wreckage as to make night movement impossible, Luettwitz decided to hold off his attack until 0400, 20 August. He placed all of his tanks (about fifteen) and his armored vehicles at the head of his column, left an infantry regiment reinforced with several antitank guns as a rear guard, and ordered what remained of his artillery to support his advance.

A dense fog hung over the area that morning, and the *2d Panzer Division* was not the only unit moving toward St. Lambert. Columns composed of all sorts of components streamed through the fog, sometimes eight abreast. When the fog lifted, a "hurricane" of Allied artillery fire descended. Vehicles dashed toward the Dives, Luettwitz later re-

³⁴ MS # A-985 (Mahlmann).

³⁵ There is a scarcity of information regarding the activities of this corps.

membered, "turned around, circled, got entangled, stopped, and were destroyed. Tall pillars of flame from burning gasoline tanks leaped into the sky, ammunition exploded, and wild horses, some severely wounded, raced" in aimless terror. Effective control was impossible.

Only the armored elements and part of an armored infantry regiment reached St. Lambert in an orderly manner about 1000. Luettwitz led an attack across the river into the village. Incredibly, the bridge across the Dives still stood despite the bombs and shells that had fallen nearby. "The crossing of the Dives bridge," Luettwitz recalled later, "was particularly horrible, the bodies of killed men, dead horses, vehicles, and other equipment having been hurled from the bridge into the river to form there a gruesome tangled mass."

On the east bank of the river, Luettwitz organized and dispatched combat troops for passage through the hail of Allied fire. Wounded that afternoon, he finally departed around 2100, reaching Orville and safety early on 21 August.³⁶

Meanwhile the *XLVII Panzer Corps* headquarters and the *1st SS Panzer Division* had probably fought across the Dives River in the St. Lambert-Chambois area early on the morning of 20 August. More than likely they completed their breakout that afternoon.³⁷

Covering the *XLVII Panzer Corps* rear, the *116th Panzer Division* had deployed in two groups on the evening of 19 August. One was in the Argentan

area, the other north of the Forêt de Gouffern near Bon-Ménil. About 0900, 20 August, the division lost radio communication with the corps headquarters. In the afternoon, when heavy Allied pressure developed against the Argentan group, it pulled back to positions north of the forest.

The pressure was exerted by the 80th Division, which finally took Argentan that day.³⁸ On the same day British troops approaching from the west moved to the Falaise-Argentan road.

Both groups of the *116th Panzer Division* remained in place during the rest of the day. When the division commander, Col. Gerhard Mueller, learned around 1800 that the corps headquarters was east of the Dives, he prepared to break out during the night at St. Lambert.

Mueller sent a reconnaissance party to St. Lambert after nightfall. Allied artillery fire on the village indicated it was not yet in Allied hands. After strenuous efforts, the troops cleared a narrow passage through the wreckage in the streets. During a two-hour period around midnight, 20 August, the division staff, remnants of the infantry regiment, 5 artillery pieces, and about 50 combat vehicles passed through the village without significant losses. They continued to Coudehard, then to Orville and safety. The Argentan group—about 8 tanks, 10 20-mm. antiaircraft guns, and about 80 Engineer troops—lost its way in the darkness, tried to break out near Trun, and was taken prisoner.³⁹

Hausser's breakout attack by the *II*

³⁶ MS # A-904 (Luettwitz).

³⁷ No information is available from corps and division sources. The above has been deduced from statements by Blauensteiner, *II Parachute Corps* chief of staff, and from incidents described by Mahlmann, Meindl, and Lt. Col. Hubert Meyer.

³⁸ For singlehandedly destroying a machine gun position that had halted his company, Pfc. Earl G. Goins was awarded the DSC.

³⁹ MS # B-162 (Mueller).

Parachute and *XLVII Panzer Corps* had thus succeeded in large measure. But success did not make it possible for the rest of the troops simply to follow out of the pocket. They too had to fight to get across the Dives River.

The missions of the two remaining corps, the *LXXXIV* and the *LXXIV*, were to cover, respectively, the northern flank and the rear of the breakout operation. Both were then to move across the Dives in the wake of the paratroopers and tankers.

The *LXXXIV Corps* had only remnants of the *12th SS Panzer Division* under its command. Because of the chaotic conditions on the roads and the complete disruption of communications, the division organized its units into two groups for better control. The motorized elements, including what remained of the artillery and the division radio section, were to follow the *1st SS Panzer Division* across the river at Chambois. The rest of the division, mostly infantry, subdivided into task forces for independent action if necessary, was to follow the *3d Parachute Division* through St. Lambert. Four or five tanks or tank destroyers were to cover the rear. General Elfeldt, the corps commander, and Lt. Col. Hubert Meyer, the division commander, accompanied the infantry group.

Around midnight of 19 August, Meyer sent a liaison patrol to the *3d Parachute Division* to obtain word on the outcome of the breakout. The patrol did not return. As all remained quiet along the Dives River, Meyer assumed that the paratroopers' penetration by stealth had succeeded. Therefore, in the very early

hours of 20 August, he ordered the infantry group to move out.

At daybreak the group came into contact with several tanks of the *1st SS Panzer Division* preparing to attack through Chambois. The armored infantrymen joined the tanks, but intense Allied artillery, tank, and antitank fire from high ground south of Chambois soon stalled the attack. Because the German armor was drawing the Allied fire, the infantry detached itself and in small groups began to cross the river between Chambois and St. Lambert. Some troops of other units were advancing toward the Allied positions and waving white handkerchiefs and flags.⁴⁰

The two commanders became separated. Elfeldt and his staff took part in an action near St. Lambert with a hastily assembled group of soldiers. Meeting strong opposition and "having literally spent his last cartridge," Elfeldt, the *LXXXIV Corps* commander, surrendered. Meyer, having crossed the Dives, took command of a group of soldiers and led them on foot across the plain toward the southern spur of Mt. Ormel. Using whatever natural concealment was available, they reached safety. Some of the motorized elements of the *12th SS Panzer Division* also escaped that afternoon. Most of the artillery was lost.

The *LXXIV Corps*, designated the covering force in the rear of the breakout attack, had, on 19 August, three of its five infantry divisions (*276th*, *277th*, and *326th*) along the northwestern perimeter of the pocket, the other two (*84th* and *363d*) assembled in the Bois de

⁴⁰ MS # A-968 (Elfeldt), MS # B-784 (Criegern), MS # P-164 (Meyer).

Feuillet. The two latter divisions were ready to cross the Dives River in the wake of the *LXXXIV Corps*, the other three were to follow on order.

Communications were practically nonexistent. Orders from corps to division could be transmitted only by staff officers. There was no liaison with the *II Parachute Corps*—General der Infanterie Erich Straube, the *LXXIV Corps* commander, had no knowledge of the time set for the breakout attack. All efforts to establish contact with the *Seventh Army* failed.⁴¹

The state of affairs in the *LXXIV Corps* sector was therefore somewhat chaotic. The *277th Division* on the corps right was in contact with two corps headquarters, its own and the *LXXXIV*, and for a while received contradictory orders from both. The two divisions farther to the south, the *276th* and *326th*, were out of touch with corps headquarters throughout the day, and both division commanders pondered the problem of whether they should continue to wait for orders or act on their own initiative.

In the early hours of 20 August, after the *12th SS Panzer Division* pulled out of the line on the *277th Division* right, the *277th* fell back to a position along a curved line facing west and northwest—about one and a half miles from Villedieu-lès-Bailleul. There the division remained for the rest of the day. Around 2300, still without orders from the corps, his men exhausted, and short ammunition even for the infantry weapons, the division commander, Colonel Wilhelm Viebig, decided to break out that night. The remnants of the divi-

sion, about 900 men, moved from their positions to a previously reconnoitered crossing site on the Dives northwest of St. Lambert. The noise of the crossing brought Allied artillery and machine gun fire, and in the ensuing confusion Viebig lost control. Nevertheless, small groups screened by heavy rain continued to move, and what remained of the division reached the *II SS Panzer Corps* lines on the morning of 21 August. A few days later, when Viebig assembled his command—combat units, administrative elements, stragglers, hospital returnees—he had about 2,500 men, of whom approximately 1,000 were combat troops.⁴²

Generalleutnant Curt Badinski's *276th Division*, on the *277th* left, received its first order from corps about 0300, 20 August: the division was to fall back, apparently in conjunction with the *277th* withdrawal, to a line just west of Vorché and on the Trun–Occagnes road. Not long after carrying out this move, Badinski received his second and last order from the corps. He was to break out of the pocket south of Trun, starting from his positions at 0830, 20 August.

Soon after his units got under way, it appeared to Badinski that an attempt to break out in broad daylight was bound to fail. Every movement was detected by Allied observation planes and immediately subjected to a heavy concentration of artillery fire. Badinski therefore halted the movement, hoping to renew the attempt after darkness, but before the day was over his command post on the edge of the Forêt de Gouffern was surrounded by Allied tanks, and Badinski and his small staff were taken prisoner. Most of the division

⁴¹ MS # B-824 (Straube).

⁴² MS # B-610 (Viebig).