

rilla bands. All three groups headed for the Kitzinger line.¹⁸

Work on the line did not progress far. Kitzinger did not have enough engineer units to supervise the preparation of tank obstacles, mine fields, and the like. Organization Todt, which had been ordered to stop construction on the Atlantic Wall—except at the V-weapon sites—in order to work for Kitzinger, was slow in responding and short of matériel and equipment; even under optimum conditions it could not have furnished enough workers to build a defensive position of the proper length and depth in the time required. Impressed civilian labor did little good, for unlike the Germans in East Prussia, who willingly dug trenches to try to stop the Russians, the French in France were hardly enthusiastic about working at a task that would only postpone their own liberation.¹⁹

Warned on 22 August that the Kitzinger line seemed hardly begun, Jodl consulted with Hitler and on the following day placed Kitzinger under *Army Group B* control. Putting Model in charge of the construction had little effect—it was already too late. The Seine River line had already been breached at Mantes-Gassicourt, and heavy American pressure on the approaches to several crossing sites along the Seine indicated that the Seine River position concept might soon, perhaps in a matter of hours, be hopelessly compromised. This meant that time for building up the Somme-Marne defense line, roughly seventy miles from the

¹⁸ OKW/WFSt Daily Operationskarten, 10-31 Aug.

¹⁹ Telecon, Model and Speidel, 1250, 28 Aug., AGp B KTB.

Seine, was extremely short. Even though Model assured Jodl on 28 August that he was getting nearby French civilians to do nothing but dig, dig, dig, he did not believe it possible to stop the Allies short of the western approaches to the Rhine River. Only on German soil could the German Army count on civilians to help construct effective fortifications.²⁰

Model needed troops, and he asked for fifteen additional divisions in the Troyes, Dijon, and Jura Mountains area; four army headquarters, twelve corps headquarters, thirty or thirty-five divisions for front-line duty, plus a panzer army, four panzer corps, and twelve panzer divisions as a mobile hard-hitting reserve for the Kitzinger line. With these, he thought he could meet with some degree of equality the fifty Allied divisions that he expected to be facing on 1 September.²¹

Though Hitler had been making arrangements to get new units to the west, he hardly could fulfill Model's request. In mid-July Hitler had ordered approximately one hundred fortress battalions, then being used in rear areas, to be transformed into replacement battalions for the front, and of these approximately eighty would eventually reach the west. In mid-August he had ordered twenty-five *Volks Grenadier* divisions organized in Germany as a general reserve, and four became available for the west almost immediately. The 3d and 15th *Panzer Grenadier Divisions*, experienced troops,

²⁰ Telecons, Blumentritt and Jodl, 2300, 22 Aug., Model and Jodl, 1920, 28 Aug., and Telecon, 1515, 23 Aug., transmitting Friedel Telecon to OB WEST, AGp B KTB; OB WEST KTB, 24 Aug.

²¹ Msg, Model to Jodl, 2300, 24 Aug., AGp B Wochenmeldungen und Lagebeurteilungen.

were traveling from Italy for commitment in France. Two "shadow divisions" (filler troops trained to restore veteran units reduced to cadre strength) and two panzer brigades (tank-infantry task forces designed to defend critical positions) were also slated for *OB WEST*. These forces would not become available until the end of August or early September, nor would they give Model his desired strength. Meanwhile, the front was disintegrating.²²

Logistical matters seemed somewhat less discouraging. The difficulties of transporting supplies to the front in July and early August had diminished as distances shrank—the reverse of the Allied situation. Summertime had provided the Germans with insufficient hours of darkness for supply movements to the Normandy coast, and their railroad trains and motor convoys, forced to travel in daylight, had attracted Allied fighter-bombers. Wrecked and plundered trucks, wagons, and freight cars littering the countryside attested to the extent of losses. The Germans had attempted to ameliorate the situation by assigning mobile *Flak* units to guard railroads and highways. Barges on the Seine had supplemented overland traffic. As the front withdrew eastward, though the problems were by no means solved, the combat troops came closer to three supply complexes that had been established on 25 July just east of the Meuse River—one in Luxembourg near Arlon, another in the Nancy and Toul area, and the third around Belfort.²³

The location of the supply bases

appeared fortunate. With the Kitzinger line practically invalidated by the speed of the Allied advance and by its incomplete state of construction, the Germans looked toward the next natural rearward obstacle that might halt the Allied drive toward Germany. The Schelde estuary, the Albert Canal, and the Meuse River formed a continuous water line. Perhaps the armies could make a successful stand there.²⁴

Since 21 August *LVIII Panzer Corps* had supervised the rehabilitation of the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies*' fragmentary panzer divisions in "refreshing areas" immediately east of the Seine, but Model soon realized that "a smooth and efficient refreshing of the divisions was out of the question." He ordered the panzer divisions to move behind the Somme and the Marne. With the Seine River crossings intolerably congested by 25 August, he instructed the *Seventh Army*—commanded by Eberbach after Hausser was wounded in the Argentan-Falaise pocket—to reconstitute its divisions behind the Somme also, while the *Fifth Panzer Army*, commanded by Dietrich, was to cover the withdrawal. Whether the troops could get back to the Somme before the Allies arrived was a matter of grave conjecture. The *First Army* forces along the upper Seine were so few that whether or not they reached the Marne was really of little importance. By 29 August Model frankly admitted that the Allies had "attained absolute tactical superiority" in both mobility and weapons, and he judged them capable of sweeping through the still uncompleted Kitzinger line and

²² *OB WEST KTB*, 21–28 Aug; Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 303; Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, p. 50.

²³ *OQu West KTB*, *Anlage 101*; Hodgson, R-58, pp. 162ff.

²⁴ *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, p. 166.

destroying the German military forces in the west.²⁵

Patton's Advance to the Meuse

Holding Seine River bridgeheads south of Paris, General Patton faced a dilemma. Eastward lay Metz, an objective that had fascinated him for a long time.²⁶ Yet an equally glowing opportunity existed to make a third envelopment according to the pattern established at Argentan and Elbeuf. If after moving south and east of Paris the Third Army wheeled north toward Beauvais, Patton would stick armored spearheads into the flank of those German forces that had escaped across the Seine River. To some commanders it seemed that the maneuver was the old Schlieffen plan in reverse, with the same weakness on the right. The maneuver would also place the Third Army athwart the routes of advance of the other armies and probably delay a drive toward the German border. Nevertheless, Patton prepared to execute both plans—a drive to Metz and an envelopment—until Bradley pointed him unequivocably eastward, toward the upper Rhine, two hundred and fifty miles away.²⁷

A series of water barriers lies between the upper Seine and the Rhine. To the northeast is the Marne, a semicircular

tiara ornamented by Château-Thierry, Epernay, Châlons-sur-Marne, Vitry-le-François, and St. Dizier. Beyond is the Vesle River and the cathedral city of Reims. Cutting across the army zone of advance next in succession come the Aisne, the Meuse (flowing through the familiar World War I towns of Verdun, St. Mihiel, and Commercy), and the Moselle (flowing through Metz and Nancy). Farther east, one hundred miles away, is the Rhine River itself, the objective of the Third Army pursuit.

Though the water obstacles offered excellent defensive opportunities, the Americans did not believe the Germans capable of organizing serious resistance.²⁸ They were right. Although the *First Army* knew of the two possible routes the Third U.S. Army might take, so few German forces were on hand that little could be done to prevent Patton from moving freely. Losses in vehicles and signal equipment, which had been extremely heavy, intensified the problem of deploying inadequate numbers of troops to threatened sectors. Knobelsdorff tried to protect the *First Army* left flank along the Seine east of Montereau by committing the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*—which had been restored to nearly full strength by two newly arrived panzer grenadier regiments composed mostly of school personnel with no unit training—and remnants of the *9th Panzer Division*—consisting of a battalion of armored infantry, four or five tanks and assault guns, and one battery of artillery. To oppose a Third Army drive toward Reims, Knobelsdorff counted on the *LXXX Corps*, which had organized absorption points along the

²⁵ Msgs, Model to Jodl, 1250, 28 Aug, and 2400, 29 Aug, *ACp B KTB; OB WEST KTB*, 21 and 25 Aug; MS # B-157 (Dingler); MS # C-017 (Speidel).

²⁶ Interv, author with Brig Gen Oscar Koch, formerly TUSA G-2, Washington, Oct 54.

²⁷ TUSA Plans for Opns, 23 Aug, and Msg, 24 Aug; 12th AGp Ltr of Instrs 6, 25 Aug; Eddy Diary, entry 24 Aug; Answers by Gen Kibler to Questions by Col Hugh M. Cole, 29 May 46, ML-501.

²⁸ See TUSA G-2 Per Rpts, 26 Aug-2 Sep.



DEMOLISHED BRIDGE AT CHÂLONS-SUR-MARNE

Marne from Melun via Château-Thierry to Châlons and, with organic remnants fleshed out by stragglers, had established a thin but coherent line from Soissons through Epernay to Châlons. Security troops, provisional units, and stationary antiaircraft detachments supplemented the combat forces in the *First Army* sector.²⁹

Although it was true that the German opposition posed no great problem, the distance from the upper Seine to the Rhine, the frontage to be covered, and the wide-open right flank were serious matters. The strength of the Third

Army south of Paris and the status of supply might not be equal to the task.

The Third Army south of Paris consisted of two corps, the XII and the XX, standing abreast, each with one armored and one infantry division—contrary to general belief, far from “top heavy” in armor. To flesh out the corps, Patton added one infantry division to each, the 90th going from Argentan to XX Corps, the 80th from Orléans to XII. The VIII Corps was not available for the eastward drive since it was engaged in Brittany, but the XV Corps, which was holding the Mantes-Gassicourt bridgehead in the First U.S. Army zone, was soon to revert to Patton’s command. Patton hoped to match the XV, the XX, and the XII Corps with his three immediate

²⁹ MS # B-222 (Knobelsdorff); MS # B-728 (Emmerich); MS # B-732 (Hold); MS # B-003 (Hoehne).

objectives, Reims, Châlons, and Vitry-le-François, but the XV Corps did not become available as soon as expected, and since only two corps were south of Paris, objectives had to be juggled.³⁰ As it turned out, the XII and XX Corps were adequate.

The problem of supplies was more serious. No appreciable ration reserves had been accumulated, clothing and individual equipment needed replacement, shortages of medical and signal supplies were becoming critical, and gasoline stocks were dangerously low. With the exception of clothing and individual equipment—which had top priority for the rest of the month—stocks were replenished by emergency measures and by good fortune. On 25 August two hundred and seven air transports landed at Orléans with 507 tons of supplies, mostly rations, and on the following day 80 tons of medical supplies were airlifted in. Ten tons of medical equipment were captured at Orléans, fifteen tons at Dreux, and twenty at Fontainebleau. Three hundred miles of German telephone wire found in a cave near Chartres replaced to a certain extent the innumerable reels of wire unraveled across the countryside. Other signal supplies arrived from England with a shipment of four truck companies to the Third Army. When Third Army gasoline receipts on 23 August fell short of daily expenditures, the Communications Zone established a special trucking service from the beaches. This, however, could not remedy the situation at once, for the XII Corps, which estimated that it used

between 200,000 and 300,000 gallons of gasoline to move fifty miles, found only 31,000 gallons on hand on 24 August and 75,000 gallons on the following day. Only the capture of thirty-seven carloads of German gasoline and oil at Sens restored stocks somewhat and made possible at least the commencement of operations east of the Seine bridgeheads.³¹

Before moving his forces beyond the Seine, Patton relinquished to the First U.S. Army the Melun bridgehead, which had been secured by the XX Corps. He also relieved XII Corps of the duty of guarding the Loire River west of Orléans by extending VIII Corps responsibility.³² With these details attended to, he ordered XX Corps to advance from Fontainbleau and Montereau to Nogent-sur-Seine, then to Reims; he instructed XII Corps to drive from Troyes to Châlons-sur-Marne. (*Map XV*)

In the XII Corps zone, CCA of the 4th Armored Division was capturing Troyes on 25 August. The German garrison of security troops and miscellaneous remnants resisted surprisingly well. Not until noon of the following day did the battle come to an end, with the Americans in possession not only of the town but of 500 prisoners and with Allied fighter-bombers harassing a small group of fleeing Germans.

While CCB swept the corps zone without encountering any resistance to speak of, and while the 35th Division protected the right flank from Orléans to Troyes, CCA on 28 August sped fifty miles from

³⁰ 12th AGp Ltr of Instrs 6, 25 Aug, and corrected copy, 29 Aug; TUSA Plans for Opns, 23 Aug, Operational Dir, 25 Aug, and Msgs, 26 Aug.

³¹ TUSA AAR, Aug.

³² TUSA Memo to VIII Corps and Operational Dir, 25 Aug.

Troyes to Vitry-le-François without difficulty and crossed the Marne. As the 80th Division attacked from Troyes toward Châlons on the west bank of the Marne, CCA moved down the east bank. By noon of 29 August the squeeze play had netted Châlons.

By then XII Corps was virtually out of gasoline. Fortunately, more than 100,000 gallons of German fuel were captured, mostly at Châlons. By careful restrictions of vehicular movement, the corps could continue toward Commercy and the Meuse River.³³

CCA of the 4th Armored turned southeast from Châlons and entered St. Dizier, which had earlier been captured by the 2d Cavalry Group, and on the morning of 31 August, in a heavy rain, the combat command drove toward the Meuse. A light company in advance of the main body surprised enemy outposts at Commercy, neutralized artillery emplacements by shooting the gun crews before they could so much as remove their breechblock covers, seized the bridge across the Meuse intact, and took possession of high ground immediately to the east.

On the same day, while the 35th Division guarded the corps right flank, CCB advanced across the Marne near Joinville. A day later, on 1 September, CCB took Vaucouleurs and seized high ground east of the Meuse. The 80th Division moved through Bar-le-Duc, took over the bridgehead at Commercy, and established another Meuse bridgehead at St. Mihiel.³⁴

³³ TUSA AAR, Aug, and Operational Dir, 30 Aug (confirming orders, 29 Aug); XII Corps AAR, Aug; Eddy Diary, entry 29 Aug.

³⁴ XII Corps, 4th Armd, 80th, and 35th Div AAR's, Aug; CI 384 (XII Corps); Koyen, *Fourth*

Much the same thing was happening in the XX Corps sector. The corps lacked positive knowledge of the forces in opposition, but it was not long before the 7th Armored Division, attacking east from Melun on 25 August, encountered troops of the 48th and 338th Division, horse-drawn artillery of the 708th Division, and tank elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier. The 5th Division attacked east from Montereau on 26 August and met somewhat less opposition as it seized Nogent-sur-Seine and Romilly.

To free the 7th Armored Division for a quick thrust northeast to Reims, Walker instructed the 5th Division to clear Provins. Then, as the 5th Division followed on the right and the 90th followed on the left, the 7th Armored spearheaded the attack toward Reims on 28 August with two combat commands abreast—a total of six columns driving ahead to fulfill General Silvester's hope that one or two at least would capture bridges over the Marne intact. Advancing against small pockets of resistance, in actuality the disintegrating panzer grenadiers, the armored division reached Epernay and came into contact with the LXXX Corps' Marne River defenders. Two platoons of American armored infantry got across a still-intact bridge near Dormans before the Germans demolished it. Though most of the bridges were already destroyed, engineers quickly threw treadways across the river during the night. From Epernay, CCB drove north toward the Aisne, bypassing Reims on the east. Meanwhile, CCA and CCR on the left jumped ahead to Château-Thierry, overran roadblocks on the out-

Armored Division, pp. 29-34; Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, p. 57.

skirts of the city, and seized several Marne River bridges. Continuing through Fismes to the Aisne on 29 August, CCA and CCR wheeled eastward and cut the roads north of Reims. The 5th Division then liberated Reims on 30 August without difficulty.

That afternoon XX Corps drove eastward in a column of divisions toward Verdun, seventy miles away. Difficult terrain such as the Argonne Forest, increasing but still scattered resistance, and the necessity of conserving gasoline slowed the advance. The Germans had installed mines to destroy the Meuse River bridge at Verdun, but the FFI prevented demolition. By noon on 31 August, 7th Armored Division tanks were in town and across the river, and on the first day of September, despite German air attacks that vainly tried to destroy the bridge, XX Corps was across the Meuse in strength.³⁵

The Third Army's eastward advance during the last week in August had been a spectacularly fast movement against disorganized opposition—pursuit warfare at its best, a headlong, pell-mell rush that swept Allied troops irresistibly toward the German border. By its nature opportunistic and relatively uncontrolled, it was also exciting. Units sought the enemy for battles of maneuver and surprise, and reconnaissance detachments and advance points had occasional nasty engagements. It was a motorized advance, everybody riding on tanks, trucks, trailers, and jeeps. It was a frantic search for bridges or fords. The Americans had the exhilaration of striking to-

ward distant objectives and maintaining an incredibly rapid movement to deny the enemy the ability to organize and defend natural terrain obstacles. It was an immense clearing operation that liberated thousands of square miles.

Pursuit warfare meant capture of exciting booty such as the thirty-four car-loads of German freight that contained parachutes (the silk was excellent for scarves and as gifts), tinned food, margarine (rumored from Indianapolis), powdered milk, sardines (supposedly from California), liver paste (allegedly from New York), and plenty of wine and cognac (indubitably French). It was also a time of hysterical happiness for liberated Frenchmen.

It was a period of confusion, when a jeepload of soldiers who had missed a turn in the road might capture a village, when an antiaircraft battery or a few Quartermaster truck drivers might inadvertently take a hundred Germans prisoner, when a single officer might go way ahead of his unit only to find that another outfit had already seized his assigned objective.

It was also a time of anxiety for commanders, of worry that gasoline supplies might be inadequate to allow continuation of a virtually unimpeded advance, of reflection that the tyranny of logistics might be more baleful than the opposition of the enemy. It was not clear then whether the reason was a shortage of gasoline on the Continent or an inability to get it forward from the beaches. The ever present possibility of a lack of fuel supplies hung like Damocles' sword, threatening to cut the triumphant Third Army movement toward the Rhine. Yet Patton remained cheerful, the most optimistic man in the world, unwilling

³⁵ XX Corps, 5th and 90th Divs, AAR's, Aug; CI 285 (7th Armd Div); Irwin Diary; *XX Corps*, pp. 94-104.

to be concerned, at least outwardly. Patton was also, it seemed, the luckiest man in the world, for captured stocks of fuel had helped him get across the Meuse.³⁶

In possession of Meuse River bridgeheads between Verdun and Commercy, Patton was in position to attack toward the Moselle between Metz and Nancy, and from there the Rhine River was barely a hundred miles away.³⁷ This was his intention, but by then his supply lines were drawn to the breaking point. Soldiers in the forward echelons needed shoes, heavy underwear, and socks, and these items could not move fast enough to reach the advancing spearheads. The mechanical beasts of burden needed spare parts and maintenance. Still the most critical shortage was gasoline. The 12th Army Group on 30 August had notified the Third Army that no appreciable gasoline stocks would be forthcoming until at least 3 September, and, sure enough, the army received no gasoline on the last day of the month.³⁸

By then the army was virtually bone dry. Individual tanks were dropping out of combat formations for lack of gasoline. The chance of a speedy resumption of the pursuit east of the Meuse, a hope that depended on motorized columns, appeared nil. To glum commanders whose units had swept across France only to immobility at the Meuse, the Biblical quotation, "But what shall it profit a man . . .," seemed apt. "It seems strange to me," General Eddy confided to his diary, "that we should be

sitting here. . . . I am convinced that if we could obtain the necessary fuel this war might be over in a matter of a few weeks." He forgot that the Third Army drive toward Metz was only the subsidiary Allied effort, and the disappointment of halting an exhilarating drive was doubly galling because he thought that the other Allied armies were still "forging ahead, evidently with everything that is needed."³⁹

Although General Eddy's reflection mirrored a feeling prevalent throughout the Third Army at the beginning of September, the other armies were not getting everything they needed. Nor would a plentiful supply of gasoline for the Third Army have won the war.⁴⁰ When gasoline became available in the first week of September and General Patton's troops attacked eastward toward the Moselle, they discovered that strong and organized German forces opposed them. Although it might have seemed to the Third Army that its brief halt had allowed enemy units to gather, the German defenders did not spring from Hitler's head full grown and fully armed as did Athena from Zeus.

It was true that the advance east of the Seine had almost immediately eliminated the newly reconstituted 17th SS *Panzer Grenadier Division* and had reduced the 48th and 338th *Divisions* to small kampfgruppen, but it was also true that the American drive that threatened Dijon, toward which the German troops in southern France were withdrawing, forced the German high command to allocate the most immediately available reinforcements to the *First Army*. By

³⁶ Stockton's Hosp Intervs (in particular with Col McHugh), III, GL-93 (235); Eddy Diary.

³⁷ TUSA Operational Dir, 30 Aug (confirming orders, 29 Aug).

³⁸ TUSA AAR, Aug.

³⁹ Eddy Diary, entry 2 Sep; Irwin Diary.

⁴⁰ See TUSA AAR, Sep.

29 August the large gap on the *First Army* left, which left open the road to the Saar by way of Vitry-le-François, Verdun, and Metz, caused OKW to assign to the *First Army*, in addition to the two panzer grenadier divisions coming from Italy, four *Volks Grenadier* divisions, two panzer brigades, and eventually several divisions that had fought in Normandy. With these forces, the *First Army* received the mission of defending the exposed German border between Luxembourg and Nancy and of preventing the potential encirclement of *Army Group B* by fighting at Moselle River.⁴¹

The Germans had shown no evidence of rout or mass collapse. On the contrary, German military government officers and OKH inspectors had manifested considerable individual initiative in scraping together provisional units and trying to slow the Americans by forcing spearheads to deploy off the roads or by destroying an occasional bridge, and by fighting wherever possible. Despite serious losses, the Germans had extricated fighting men of good quality. It was the security troops, the antiaircraft personnel, and the supply forces who filled the American prisoner of war cages, not the combat soldiers, and American intelligence officers recognized that the enemy was preparing a defensive line "known only to himself." Although the Germans were wholly on the defensive, they were trading earth for time in the hope that worsening weather conditions, bringing poor visibility and

mud, would ground Allied airplanes and immobilize Allied tanks.⁴²

If Patton's troops had not met stiffened resistance at the Moselle, they would have encountered it at the Rhine. In either case, the rugged warfare that awaited the Third Army was to bring disturbing memories of the hedgerows. The Lorraine campaign was to prove that the August pursuit was a finite experience. Adequate gasoline at the end of the month would probably not have sustained the dream of an unlimited pursuit terminating in quick victory.⁴³

The Main Effort

The Allied pursuit launched across the lower Seine and from the Melun bridgehead exhibited the same characteristics displayed by the pursuit beyond the upper Seine. "The enemy has not the troops to hold any strong position," General Montgomery had advised.

The proper tactics now are for strong armored and mobile columns to bypass enemy centers of resistance and push boldly ahead, creating alarm and despondency in enemy rear areas. Enemy bypassed will be dealt with by infantry columns coming on later. I rely on commanders of every rank and grade to "drive" ahead with the utmost energy; any tendency to be "sticky" or cautious must be stamped on ruthlessly.⁴⁴

More German forces than had opposed the Third Army were in the Allied path of advance nearer the coast, but

⁴¹ OB WEST KTB, 29 and 31 Aug, *Anlagen 1800* and 1829; MS # B-034 (Schramm); MS # B-214 (Mantey); OB WEST, *a Study in Command*, p. 139; Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*, p. 50.

⁴² See Cole, *Lorraine Campaign*.

⁴³ 21 AGp Gen Operational Situation and Dir, M-520, 26 Aug, SG8 SHAEF File 381, Post-OVERLORD PIns.

they were in bad straits. Road congestion added to the problems of German commanders who sought with little success to preserve a semblance of order in the flight to the Somme River. With artillery and antitank guns lost, staffs and technical services dispersed, command and communication virtually nonexistent, and rumors spreading among the troops that everyone was heading back to Germany, the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies* found it impossible to conduct controlled operations. There had been no over-all planning early enough to make the withdrawal beyond the Seine an orderly procedure, and after a brief attempt by some units to make a stand, all fell back to the Somme.

The *LXVII Corps*, under the control of the *Fifteenth Army* and responsible for the coastal area between the Seine and the Somme, had received no orders to direct the river crossings of the troops streaming eastward, but did so anyway. Co-ordinating with the *Fifth Panzer Army* traffic control staff, the *LXVII Corps* tried to collect troops, allocate them to assembly areas, and secure supplies for them—a hopeless task that came to an end on 27 or 28 August when the *Fifteenth Army* ordered the corps to withdraw behind the Somme.⁴⁵

The *LVIII Panzer Corps* had appointed about one hundred officers to block the roads and stop the beginnings of a panic-stricken retreat toward Reims and points east. Under the control of the *First Army*, the corps tried to form a defensive line between the Oise and the Seine, positions generally northeast of Paris, from Beaumont to Meaux—with

panzer remnants; with the *348th Division*, which was arriving in a dilatory fashion from northern France too late to strengthen the Paris defenses as intended; and with fragments of the *18th Luftwaffe Field Division* and the *6th Parachute Division*. When news came that the *First Army* was falling back from the upper Seine toward Reims, *Army Group B* assigned the *LVIII Panzer Corps* to the *Fifth Panzer Army*. Lacking communications with army, without even knowledge of where the army command post was located, the corps decided to withdraw toward Compiègne.⁴⁶

The *LXXXI Corps*, directed to hold the area around Vernon, tried to cling to wooded terrain near Mantes with several straggler battalions and panzer troops formerly belonging to the *II SS Panzer Corps*. Allied attacks as well as the general climate of retreat soon dissipated combat strength, and, without units capable of battle and without supplies, the *LXXXI Corps* withdrew toward the Somme.⁴⁷

As the German forces rushed rearward, a vast undefended gap opened between the weak forces of the *First Army* and the conglomerate masses of the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies* seeking refuge in the Pas-de-Calais area, which was defended by the *Fifteenth Army*. Into the gap came the First U.S. Army.

General Hodges was to support the British by advancing in a northeasterly direction from the Mantes-Gassicourt-Melun line to Péronne-Laon, more than

⁴⁵ MS # B-596 (Gerber); MS # B-236 (Sponheimer).

⁴⁶ MS # B-157 (Dingler); MS # B-728 (Emmerich).

⁴⁷ MS # B-807 (Kuntzen); MS # B-728 (Emmerich).