

continues the miracle may still take place. Buoyed up by accounts of what V1 had done, no less than by the promise of V2, and still imbued with a discipline that has been impaired only by the substitution of apathy for enthusiasm, the German soldier is still on the [Nazi] party's side."⁴⁸

The fact was that very few officers in the west were implicated in the plot against Hitler. A small but important group in the headquarters of the Military Governor of France at Paris staged a coup that was successful for several hours, but except for isolated individuals who knew of the conspiracy, and rarer still those who were in sympathy with it, the military elsewhere on the Western Front were overwhelmingly loyal to Hitler, even though some might be doubtful of the eventual outcome of the war. Those who did play some small role in the plot had not deliberately or unconsciously hindered field operations by treasonable conduct. The conspiracy had virtually no effect on the military situation in the west. The combat soldier in the "you-or-me" life-and-death struggle was too busy trying to remain alive.⁴⁹ The higher officers pledged their continuing loyalty to Hitler. All Germans were more or less impressed with the miracle that had saved Hitler's life.⁵⁰

As a result of the *Putsch*, the effi-

ciency of the German war machine under Hitler increased, for Himmler took immediate steps to unify the military replacement system and eventually improved it. The *Putsch* also intensified Hitler's unfounded suspicion that mediocrity among his military commanders might in reality be treason. Rommel, recuperating at home from an injury received in Normandy, was eventually incriminated and forced to commit suicide. Speidel, the *Army Group B* chief of staff, was later imprisoned on evidence that indicated involvement. Kluge, the principal commander in the west, fell under suspicion nearly a month later when battlefield reverses in Normandy seemed to give substance to whispered accusations of his friendliness with known conspirators. Thus the *Putsch*, while giving Hitler the opportunity to consolidate military control even more in his own hands, pointed a blunt warning that the symptoms of military defeat were spreading an infectious distrust and suspicion among the higher echelons of the German military organization.⁵¹

On the battlefield in Normandy the half-hearted planning for an offensive action near Caen in August came to an end. Even before Goodwood had violently disrupted German operational planning, Rommel, just before his near-fatal accident, had estimated that the Germans could hold the Normandy front only a few more weeks at the maximum.⁵² Several days later Kluge en-

⁴⁸ Hitler and His Generals, cited above, n. 46.

⁴⁹ See XIX Corps G-2 Per Rpt 55, Annex 3, Study of the Morale of the German Troops on XIX Corps Front, 9 Aug.

⁵⁰ See Constantine FitzGibbon, *20 July* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1956) and John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1953) for accounts of the *Putsch*.

⁵¹ Hodgson, R-57; *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, I, 123ff; MS # B-272 (Blumentritt).

⁵² Wilhelm Ritter von Schramm, *Der 20. Juli in Paris* (Bad Woerishofen, Germany: 1953), p. 77; Speidel, *Invasion 1944*, pp. 113-17.

dorsed Rommel's view. In a letter to Hitler he stated the hard facts clearly:

In the face of the total enemy air superiority, we can adopt no tactics to compensate for the annihilating power of air except to retire from the battle field. . . . I came here with the firm resolve to enforce your command to stand and hold at all cost. The price of that policy is the steady and certain destruction of our troops. . . . The flow of matériel and personnel replacements is insufficient, and artillery and antitank weapons and ammunition are far from adequate. . . . Because the main force of our defense lies in the willingness of our troops to fight, then concern for the immediate future of this front is more than justified. . . . Despite all our efforts, the moment is fast approaching when our hard-pressed defenses will crack. When the enemy has erupted into open terrain, the inadequate mobility of our forces will make orderly and effective conduct of the battle hardly possible.⁵³

When GOODWOOD seemed to confirm Rommel's and Kluge's opinions, OKW became doubtful of the value of planning an offensive. Until the Germans learned where Patton was, they could not dispel their uncertainty about Allied intentions and consequently could not intelligently plan offensive action or weaken the Pas-de-Calais forces to bolster the Normandy front. On 23 July, immediately upon receipt of Kluge's letter, Jodl proposed to Hitler that it might be time to begin planning for an eventual withdrawal from France. Surprisingly enough, Hitler agreed.⁵⁴ But before anything came of this conversation, COBRA raised its head.

The Breakthrough Plan

The persons most intimately connected with COBRA were General Bradley, who conceived it, and General Collins, who executed it. These officers, warm personal friends, each of whom seemed to be able to anticipate what the other was about to do, worked together so closely on the plans and on the developing operations that it was sometimes difficult to separate their individual contributions. Their teamwork was particularly effective within the American concept of command where the higher commander often gives his subordinate great leeway in the detailed planning of an operation. On the basis of reconnaissance, terrain study, road conditions, and photo analysis, the subordinate commander could recommend modifications that might alter quite basically the original idea. With fine communications at their disposal, the American commanders at both echelons (indeed at all levels of command) could and did exchange information and suggestions, and measures proposed by the subordinate could be approved quickly by the higher authority. Where mutual confidence abounded as it did in the case of Generals Bradley and Collins, the closest co-operation resulted, with great credit to both.

General Bradley presented the COBRA idea at a conference with his staff and his corps commanders on 12 July. He characterized the battle of the hedgerows as "tough and costly . . . a slugger's match . . . too slow a process," and spoke of his hope for a swift advance

⁵³ Ltr, Kluge to Hitler, 21 Jul, *OB WEST Ia Nr. 5895/44* and *5896/44 g.Kdos. Chefs*, and enclosure, *Betrachtungen zur Lage*, signed Rommel, 15 Jul, *AGp B Lagebeurteilungen und Wochenmeldungen*.

⁵⁴ *Der Westen* (Schramm), pp. 68-69; Speidel, *Invasion 1944*, pp. 115-16; Gestapo Rpt to Bor-

mann, 30 Jul, *EAP 105/22*, 275-76; Hodgson, R-54 and R-57.

made possible by "three or four thousand tons of bombs" from the air. He stated that aggressive action and a readiness to take stiff losses if necessary were the keys to the success of COBRA. "If they [the Germans] get set [again]," he warned, "we go right back to this hedge fighting and you can't make any speed." He insisted, "This thing [COBRA] must be bold."⁵⁵

Requisites for the COBRA operation were many and complex, and General Bradley could only estimate that they in fact were fulfilled. He assumed that the Germans in the Cotentin, under the pressure of the July offensive, would withdraw to an organized and stable defensive line. He had to determine where they would be likely to erect their defense. He had to be certain that the Americans were in contact with the main line of resistance when the operation commenced. He had to be sure that the enemy line would not be so strongly fortified as to defy rapid penetration. He had to have firm ground beyond the Cotentin marshes that would not mire and delay mobile columns. He had to have a region traversed by a sufficient number of roads to permit quick passage of large numbers of troops. Finally, he had to be reasonably sure he could shake his armor loose before the Germans could recuperate from the penetration.⁵⁶

Reasoning that the Germans would withdraw to the vicinity of the Lessay-

St. Lô highway, General Bradley chose that road as the COBRA line of departure. The COBRA battleground—the Coutances–St. Lô plateau—was to be south of the highway. It was a region of typical *bocage*, an area of small woods and small hills, land bounded on the west by the ocean, on the east by the Vire River. The sombre hedgerowed lowland gave way to rolling and cheerful terrain, the swamps disappeared, arable land was more plentiful and fertile, the farms more prosperous, the hedgerowed fields larger. Pastoral hillsides replaced the desolation of the *prairies* and the over-luxuriant foliage of the Carentan lowlands. Roads were plentiful, for the most part tarred two-lane routes. There were several wider highways—four main roads leading south and three principal east–west roads across the Cotentin. Road centers such as Coutances, Marigny, St. Gilles, le Mesnil-Herman, and Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly assured an adequate communications network. Streams were relatively small.

A jumble of small ridge lines and low hills at first glance, the Coutances–St. Lô plateau contains a series of east–west ridges that rise toward the south for about eight miles from the Lessay–St. Lô highway. Forming cross-compartments that would hinder an advance to the south, the ridges favored lateral movement across the First Army front. When in July the VII Corps had attacked down the Carentan–Périers isthmus toward the plateau, General Collins had indicated awareness of the advantages of swinging the offensive to a lateral axis in that region. He had pointed out that if infantry forces reached Marigny, armored troops might well drive west-

⁵⁵ FUSA G-3 Conf Notes, 12 Jul, FUSA G-3 Misc File; Garth, *Battle for Normandy*, pp. 156, 171.

⁵⁶ FUSA G-3 Conf Notes, 12 Jul; FUSA Outline Plan, Opn COBRA, 13 Jul; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 318.

ward along the highway from St. Lô to Coutances in exploitation.⁵⁷ General Bradley's COBRA plan took advantage of the terrain in the same way. After air force bombs facilitated the infantry penetration, mobile troops were to veer westward and drive to the Coutances, thereby encircling the Germans on the west coast of the Cotentin.

General Bradley called upon the VII Corps to make the main effort. He therefore changed the corps boundary to reduce the corps zone to a width of four and a half miles. He also enlarged General Collins' force to a total of three infantry and two armored divisions. (*Map 10*)

As outlined by the army plan, COBRA would start with a tremendous air bombardment designed to obliterate the German defenses along the Périers-St. Lô highway opposite the VII Corps. Two infantry divisions, the 9th and the 30th, were to make the penetration and keep the breach open by securing the towns of Marigny and St. Gilles, thereby sealing off the flanks of the breakthrough. Two armored divisions, the 3d and the 2d (the latter after being moved from the V Corps sector), and a motorized infantry division, the 1st (also after having been moved from the V to the VII Corps zone), were then to speed through the passageway—the three-mile-wide Marigny-St. Gilles gap—in exploitation. Tactical aircraft were to have already destroyed river bridges around the limits of the projected COBRA area to isolate the battlefield, and the exploiting forces on the left were to establish blocking positions on the eastern flank and along

the southern edge of the battlefield to prevent the Germans from bringing in reinforcements. The forces in the main exploiting thrust, on the right (west), were to drive toward the Cotentin west coast near Coutances and encircle the enemy opposite VIII Corps. The VIII Corps in turn was to squeeze and destroy the surrounded enemy forces. At the conclusion of COBRA, the First Army would find itself consolidating on the Coutances-Caumont line. If the air bombardment and ground attack paralyzed German reaction completely, the troops were to be ready to exploit enemy disorganization still further by continuing offensive operations without consolidation.⁵⁸

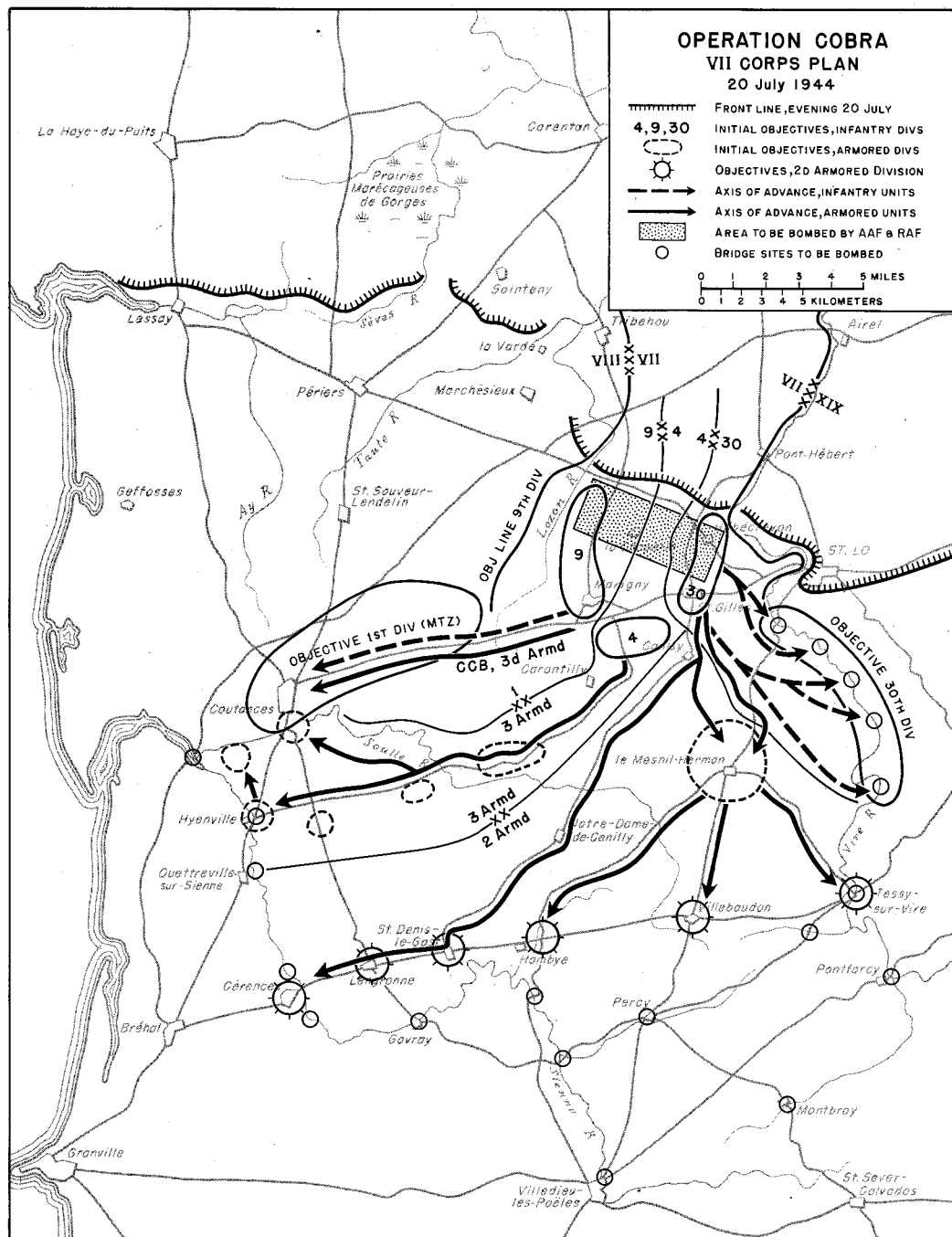
Since the larger and basic American maneuver defined by Montgomery was to be a sweep through the Cotentin around a 90-degree arc with the pivot at Caumont, the U.S. troops east of the Vire had the subsidiary role of containing the enemy forces. While XIX Corps remained in place and supported the VII Corps effort, V Corps was to make a diversionary attack on the second day of the COBRA operation. Both corps

⁵⁸ FUSA Outline Plan COBRA, 13 Jul, with artillery and tank destroyer fire support plans, overlays, and amendments; FUSA Msg, 2055, 14 Jul, and IX TAC Msg, 17 Jul (Amendment 1 to IX TAC Order 84). Both in FUSA G-3 Jnl. Annex 2 (Overlay) to VIII Corps FO 8, 15 Jul; VII Corps Ops Memos 38 and 44, 15 and 20 Jul.

Bombardment on 17 July rendered eight bridges around the COBRA battlefield unserviceable and damaged five; seven bridges escaped damage. Collins Msg, 1230, 23 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

For the British-American boundary changes that permitted the movement of the 2d Armored and 1st Division from the V Corps to the VII Corps sector, see FUSA Msgs, 14 and 17 Jul, and V Corps Msg, 23 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl; 21 AGp Dir, M-510, 10 Jul; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 326-28.

⁵⁷ VII Corps Tactical Study of the Terrain, 28 Jun.



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MAP 10

were to tie down German troops that might otherwise be moved to seal off a COBRA penetration. The XIX Corps was also to be ready to displace west of the Vire River and assume a new zone; as VII Corps veered westward toward Coutances, XIX Corps was to be prepared to take over the left portion of the VII Corps zone and drive to the south along the west bank of the river.⁵⁹

The rather general concept expressed in the army outline plan was developed into a detailed course of action by the VII Corps. Corps planners also made two major modifications that affected the weight of the infantry assault and the routes as well as the relative strengths of the exploiting units.

Because the 9th and 30th Divisions were near exhaustion from their battle in the Taute and Vire region, General Collins requested and received the 4th Division as well, and assigned to it a role in the initial infantry assault. Though General Bradley had planned to retain the 4th in army reserve, he acceded to Collins' request in order to insure a quick follow-up of the air bombardment and a speedy penetration.⁶⁰

More important was the modification

of the exploitation, which virtually changed the character of COBRA. According to the army plan, the mobile forces were to use two main highways leading south, the Marigny-Carantilly road on the right (west) and the St. Gilles-Canisy road on the left. One armored division, presumably the 3d, after moving south for six miles to Carantilly, was to swing in a wide arc for eleven miles—southwest, west, and north-west—to encircle Coutances in the corps main effort. The other armored division, the 2d, after pushing five miles south to Canisy, was to split into three columns and drive southeast, south, and southwest in order to protect the main effort developing toward Coutances. At the conclusion of its advance, the 2d Armored Division was to set up blocking positions across the fronts of both the VII and the VIII Corps—at Bréhal, Cérences, Lengronne, St. Denis-le-Gast, and Hambye, also inferentially at Villebaudon and Tessy-sur-Vire—and thereby across the entire Cotentin. In advance of the forces actually encircling and destroying the enemy near Coutances, the blocking positions were to prevent the Germans from bringing in reinforcements from the southeast and from the south. The motorized 1st Infantry Division was to provide reserve strength to reinforce either armored thrust, or both.⁶¹

Less concerned with the possible arrival of enemy reinforcements than with the strength already facing the VII and VIII Corps in the Cotentin, General Collins redistributed the power available to him. He re-formed and strengthened

⁵⁹ FUSA Outline Plan COBRA, 13 Jul; Corlett to OCMH, 19 Jan 54. Plans at the beginning of July had envisioned the eventual displacement of the XIX Corps west of the Vire. These plans had projected an easy capture of St. Lô, and the displacement was to have occurred south of that city. Map Overlay to accompany V Corps FO 9, 1 Jul, in *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, p. 103.

⁶⁰ First U.S. Army, *Report of Operations*, I, 98; VII Corps G-3 Ltr, Info Relative to Opn COBRA, 29 Oct 45, and Ltr, Gen Collins to Maj Kenneth W. Hechler, 13 Nov 45, both cited on p. 27 of Hechler's VII Corps in Operation COBRA, a preliminary MS, Hist Div, USAFET, OCMH Files. The Hechler manuscript has been used extensively in the chapters dealing with the breakthrough.

⁶¹ FUSA Outline Plan COBRA, 13 Jul; see also Annex 2 (Overlay) to VIII Corps FO 8, 15 Jul.

the main attack force and rerouted it along a more direct approach to Coutances. He transformed the drive along the original and longer route to Coutances into a subsidiary and protective effort. He consolidated the blocking force on the left from three dispersed columns into two compact thrusts.

As formulated by Collins, the plan of exploitation assigned the main encirclement to the motorized 1st Division, with Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division attached. Armor and infantry, after driving south to Marigny, were to attack westward along the excellent highway directly to Coutances in order to block and help destroy the Germans facing the VIII Corps. The 3d Armored Division, less CCB, was to follow the original and more roundabout route to Coutances; it was to seize the southern exits of Coutances and provide flank protection on the south for the main effort. The 2d Armored Division, strengthened by the attachment of the 22d Regimental Combat Team of the 4th Division, was to drive along the left (east) flank of the corps. One thrust was to go directly to le Mesnil-Herman to cover the movement of the other exploiting forces and prepare for further movement to Villebaudon and Tessy-sur-Vire, two critical points of entry for possible German reinforcements from the southeast. Another 2d Armored Division force was to be ready to go southwest from Canisy through Notre-Dame-de-Cenilly to block German reinforcement from the south, but instead of driving all the way to Bréhal near the Cotentin west coast it was to stop at Cérences. The armor was to halt at Cérences in order to provide a coastal corridor for an advance to the south by

the VIII Corps, to avoid "a hell of a scramble" likely to come if VII and VIII Corps units intermingled south of Coutances, and to prevent the 2d Armored Division from being "strung out too badly."⁶²

The COBRA plan in final form thus called for three infantry divisions, the 9th, 4th, and 30th, to make the initial penetration close behind the air bombardment and create a "defended corridor" for exploiting forces, which were to stream westward toward the sea. The motorized 1st Division, with CCB of the 3d Armored Division attached, was to thrust directly toward Coutances. The reduced 3d Armored Division was to make a wider envelopment. The 2d Armored Division, with the 22d Infantry attached, was to establish blocking positions from Tessy-sur-Vire to the Sienne River near Cérences and, in effect, make a still wider envelopment of Coutances.⁶³

The VII Corps plan expressed a concept quite different from the army idea. The corps plan reinforced the initial infantry assault. It massed more power against Coutances. It strengthened blocking positions. It projected three encircling columns across the Cotentin and around Coutances. Instead of cutting across the VIII Corps zone of advance, it provided a corridor for the VIII Corps to exploit further a successfully completed COBRA. As a result of these changes, COBRA was no longer a plan designed primarily to encircle Coutances after penetration; it had be-

⁶² VII Corps FO 6 (rev), 20 Jul; FUSA G-3 Conf Notes, 12 Jul; Ltr, Collins to Hechler, 9 Dec 45, quoted in Hechler, VII Corps in Opn COBRA, p. 27.

⁶³ Annex 1 (Overlay) to VII Corps FO 6 (rev), 20 Jul.

come a plan to encircle and secure Coutances, disrupt the German defenses west of the Vire River, and set up a situation suitable for further exploitation, presumably by the VIII Corps.

Expecting the VII Corps ground attack to complete the penetration six hours after the bombardment, General Bradley originally scheduled the VIII Corps attack for that time. The failure of both preliminary operations in the VIII Corps zone caused him to modify this arrangement. If the German resistance to the pre-COBRA operations at la Varde and St. Germain was typical of what the Americans could anticipate in COBRA, then six hours was not enough time. General Bradley consequently postponed the VIII Corps attack. If COBRA were launched in the morning, VIII Corps would attack at dawn of the following day; if COBRA were launched in the afternoon, VIII Corps would attack on the morning of the third day.⁶⁴

One other change in plan came as a result of the preliminary operations. Instead of reverting to control of the 83d Division, the 330th Infantry east of the Taute River flats remained a separate unit. Although still considered formally under control of the VIII Corps, the regiment was to begin the COBRA attack with the VII Corps.

Since COBRA's success depended essentially on VII Corps progress, General Collins had six divisions under his control, virtually an army. The armored units augmented the corps strength still more since both were "old type" or "heavy" armored divisions, the only ones in the theater. All the divisions sched-

uled to make the VII Corps COBRA attack were combat experienced; three—the 2d Armored, the 1st, and the 9th—had fought in North Africa and Sicily. While the 9th and 30th manned the corps front in mid-July, the other divisions slated for commitment in COBRA assembled in the rear, careful to avoid contact with the enemy lest their identity be revealed. Tactical surprise was to be as important in COBRA as was the concentration of strength.

In keeping with the mission of VII Corps, First Army gave the corps a large part of its artillery: 9 of its 21 heavy battalions, 5 of its 19 mediums, and all 7 of its nondivisional lights. Nondivisional artillery pieces of all types under corps control totaled 258.⁶⁵ For the anticipated duration of the attack—five days—the army allocated the VII Corps almost 140,000 rounds of artillery ammunition.⁶⁶ Because ammunition restrictions made all-inclusive prearranged fires difficult, the VII Corps Artillery (Brig. Gen. Williston B. Palmer) did not draw up an over-all fire plan. Attaching to the divisions all seven of the light battalions the army had made available, the corps suballocated to the divisions the greater part of its supply of ammunition.⁶⁷ The division fire plans included

⁶⁴ VIII Corps had 108, XIX Corps 100, V Corps 98. Draft MS, Arty in Opn COBRA, App. C to Gen Bd Rpts, ML-2229.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* VIII Corps received about 42,000 rounds, XIX Corps 31,000, and V Corps 27,000, for 105-mm. howitzers, 155-mm. howitzers and guns, 4.5-inch guns, 8-inch howitzers and guns, 240-mm. howitzers, and 90-mm. guns.

⁶⁷ Each armored division received two self-propelled battalions, the 9th Division received two towed battalions, and the 30th Division received one towed battalion. The 30th also received the 92d Chemical Battalion, less one company. VII Corps Opns Memo 45, 22 Jul.

⁶⁴ FUSA Msg to VIII Corps, 24 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl.

concentrations on known or suspected enemy installations, some to strike as far as 3,000 yards south of the Périers–St. Lô highway, most to fall on the main enemy defenses near the road. All fire plans emphasized striking specific targets rather than furnishing general support.⁶⁸ The VII Corps Artillery was to control 174 pieces of medium and heavy caliber, plus the artillery of the divisions initially in reserve. Adjacent corps artillery units were to assist.

The major preattack bombardment was to come from the air. Planes were to assume the normal artillery missions of disrupting the enemy's communications, neutralizing his reserves, and reducing his will to fight. Far beyond the resources of the artillery available to the First Army, the air bombardment that General Bradley had in mind encompassed terrifying power. To be certain that air commanders appreciated the extent of the support desired, General Bradley went to England on 19 July to present his requirements to the air chiefs in person.

Bradley's primary desire was to obtain "blast effect" by the use of heavy bombers.⁶⁹ He wanted the air attack concentrated in mass, the planes to strike in a minimum duration of time. To avoid excessive cratering, which might impede the ground troops, and to prevent the destruction of villages located at critical road junctions, he requested that only relatively light bombs be

used.⁷⁰ He designated a rectangular target immediately south of the Périers–St. Lô highway, 7,000 yards wide and 2,500 yards deep. To prevent accidental bombing of VII Corps front-line troops, Bradley planned to withdraw them 800 yards from the bomb target. Though 800 yards left no real margin of safety, General Bradley wanted the ground troops close enough to the target for immediate exploitation after the bombardment. To provide additional protection for the ground forces, General Bradley recommended that the planes make their bomb runs laterally across the front, parallel to the front lines, instead of approaching over the heads of American troops and perpendicular to the front. Recognizing that pilots preferred a perpendicular approach to minimize antiaircraft interference, he suggested that the planes use the sun for concealment—if the attack occurred in the morning, the bombers could fly from east to west; in the afternoon, they could attack over a reverse course. In either case, the straight road between Périers and St. Lô would be an unmistakably clear landmark as a flank guide.

For their part, the air chiefs were unable to meet all the requirements. Although they promised blast effect by a mass attack, agreed to use comparatively light bombs, and concurred in the choice of the target, they demurred at making lateral bomb runs and objected to the slender 800-yard safety factor.

A lateral bomb run, the air chiefs

⁶⁸ VII Corps Letters, Primary Target List—Operation COBRA—Artillery and Air, and Secondary Target List . . . , both dated 20 July, list 42 primary targets and 75 secondary targets.

⁶⁹ FUSA G-3 Conf, 12 Jul; Garth, *Battle for Normandy*, p. 165.

⁷⁰ FUSA G-3 Conf, 12 Jul; Ltrs, Leigh-Mallory to Bradley, 19 Jul, and Bradley to Leigh-Mallory, 23 Jul, OCMH Files; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 341.

pointed out, meant approaching the target area on its narrow side, that is to say along a narrow corridor. In an operation on the scale requested by General Bradley, this would cause congestion over the target and make the completion of the attack impossible in the brief time desired. To gain the effect of mass, the bombers had to approach from the north over the heads of the ground troops. Admitting that this posed some dangers to the ground troops, the air chiefs noted that the highway would serve as a clearly distinguishable "no bomb line." In addition, the less effective enemy aircraft interference during a perpendicular approach would enable pilots and bombardiers to bomb more accurately.⁷¹

Despite the fact that the highway made an excellent landmark, the air chiefs wished a true safety ground factor of 3,000 yards. They nevertheless agreed, in light of General Bradley's desire to get the ground troops to the target area quickly, to reduce the safety factor to 1,500 yards. Bradley, for his part, refused to withdraw his troops more than 1,000 yards from the highway.⁷² The final result was a further compromise. The ground troops were to withdraw only 1,200 yards, but the heavy bombers were to strike no closer to the ground troops than 1,450 yards. The interval of 250 yards was to be

covered by fighter-bombers, which attacked at lower altitudes than the heavies and thus could bomb more accurately.

Participating units in the COBRA air attack were to include all the heavy bombers of the Eighth U.S. Air Force and all the medium bombers and fighter-bombers of the Ninth U.S. Air Force. Fighter planes from the Eighth U.S. Air Force and from the RAF 2nd Tactical Air Force were to fly cover. The RAF Heavy Bomber Command, with planes equipped to carry only large bombs, were excluded because of Bradley's desire to avoid excessive destruction and cratering.⁷³ Air Chief Marshal Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander, provided top-level supervision. Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, commander of the AEAFF, was to set the time and the date of the operation. General Brereton, commanding the Ninth U.S. Air Force, was to plan the attack of the bombers. General Quesada, commander of the IX Tactical Air Command, was to co-ordinate the air attack with the ground forces.⁷⁴

The air bombardment was to begin eighty minutes before the ground attack with a twenty-minute strike by 350 fighter-bombers. Most fighter-bombers were to attack the narrow target strip immediately south of and adjacent to the road, although several flights were to bomb and strafe six enemy strongpoints north of the Périers-St. Lô highway.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Eighth AF Draft Ltr, Summary of Plng and Execution of Missions 24 and 25 Jul 44, n.d., Rpts of Bombing Errors Made on 25 Jul, 8 Aug 44, USAF Hist Sec Files.

⁷² Some commanders, notably General Eddy of the 9th Division, later protested any withdrawal to General Bradley, for they were reluctant to give up terrain acquired with much difficulty. Bradley *Soldier's Story*, pp. 340-41.

⁷³ Ltr, Leigh-Mallory to Bradley, 19 Jul; Eighth AF, Spec Rpt on Opns 24 and 25 Jul, USAF Hist Sec Files.

⁷⁴ Eighth AF, Tactical Mission Rpts, Operations 492 and 494, 24 and 25 July, USAF Hist Sec Files, give a most straightforward account of the air operation.

⁷⁵ VII Corps Opns Memo 45, 22 Jul.