

Allied planes that pursued even individual vehicles, the *Seventh Army* maintained discipline. Two circumstances, German commanders recalled later, aided them in their river crossing: in their opinion, the British "did not follow up very vigorously from the west," and Allied planes concentrated their attacks on Trun, Chambois, and Vimoutiers rather than farther to the west over the Orne.⁶

Enter Model, Exit Kluge

Early on 18 August, at 0600, Field Marshal Model, the *OB WEST* and *Army Group B* commander-designate, drove to the *Fifth Panzer Army* command post near Lisieux to confer with Dietrich, Eberbach, and Hausser. Since Hausser was unwilling to leave his troops at that critical time, his chief of staff, Generalmajor Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, represented him at the conference. All the conferees were in general agreement on the measures that needed to be taken.

Above all, a front had to be re-established, either one west of the Seine River or one along it, according to the way the situation developed. The first attempt to stabilize the front was to be made along the Touques River. The *Seventh Army*, with *Panzer Group Eberbach* subordinated to it for the withdrawal operation, was to get out of the pocket as quickly as possible. The *Seventh Army* had to be behind the Dives River on 20 August and behind the Touques two days later. *Panzer Group Eberbach* was to be responsible for protecting the

northern flank with the *II SS Panzer Corps* (2d SS, 9th SS, 12th SS, and 21st *Panzer Divisions*) and the southern flank with the *XLVII Panzer Corps* (2d and 116th *Panzer Divisions*).⁷

Returning to his headquarters that afternoon, Model reported his views to Jodl and requested their immediate referral to the Fuehrer. Model's appraisal of the situation and discussion with his commanders led him to make four main points. First, the outcome of the withdrawal operation and the prospect of supplying the troops depended heavily on reducing the absolute air supremacy of the Allies for the next few days. Second, hard fighting on the ground would be necessary during the withdrawal, but Model hoped to accomplish the withdrawal according to the following timetable: during the night of 18 August, to the Falaise-Argentan road; during the night of 19 August, behind the Dives River; during the night of 20 August, to the Touques River-Laigle line. He hoped also to be able to release certain armored units and headquarters for assembly near the Seine. Third, upon completion of the withdrawal, the *Seventh Army* was to take command of the sector from the sea to Laigle, inclusive; the *Fifth Panzer Army*, under Eberbach, was to assume responsibility for the sector between Laigle and Paris. The *First Army*, moving northeastward from the Atlantic coast of France, was to take charge of the Paris sector and the upper Seine River. Fourth, the troops were spent; no combat performance of any kind could be

⁶ MS # B-727 (Gersdorff) and MS # A-922 (Eberbach).

⁷ Min of Conf, 18 Aug, *Fifth Pz Army KTB*, *Anlage 34*; Tempelhoff Telecon, 1050, 18 Aug, *AGP B KTB*.

expected from them unless certain minimum requirements were fulfilled.

Model listed the minimum requirements. He needed without delay 20 replacement battalions—4 for panzer divisions, 6 for SS panzer divisions, and 10 for infantry divisions—plus 5 army engineer battalions. As an example of how depleted his units were, he planned to form four *kampfgruppen* from remnants of ten divisions—one *kampfgruppe* consisting of what remained of the 84th, 85th, 89th, and 271st Divisions and comprising 1,200 men and 8 artillery batteries; another *kampfgruppe* consisting of the 276th, 277th, 326th, and 363d Divisions and totaling 1,300 men and 8 batteries; a third of the 3d Parachute Division, 1,500 men and 8 batteries; and a fourth of the 353d Division, 2,000 men and 6 batteries.

He also needed immediate matériel replacements: at least 270 tanks or assault guns to provide each armored division with about 30; 9 artillery battalions of 108-mm. howitzers to replace guns lost by the panzer divisions; and as many 180-mm. howitzers as possible. He required a 9,000-ton capacity transportation facility to expedite the delivery of essential supplies and the movement of reserve units to the front. And, finally, he requested that 6 panzer brigades in the process of activation in Germany be dispatched to the Western Front.⁸

Meanwhile, the situation on the *Army Group B* front had again deteriorated on 18 August. The army group reported the left flank of the LXXXVI Corps pushed behind the Vie River, still out of contact with the I SS Panzer

Corps. Deep penetrations had occurred east and west of the Dives. East of the river the Canadians were in possession of Trun and had advanced to the vicinity of St. Lambert, while a British thrust along the Falaise–Argentan highway reached a point about halfway between the two towns. The pressure from the south was generally contained, but along the eastern edge of the woodland east of Argentan American forces had unhinged the southern shoulder and threatened Chambois. By the end of the day, the gap on the eastern end of the pocket appeared closed, though presumably as yet only with weak forces.⁹

The most significant development had occurred on the north flank in the zone of the 2d Canadian Corps. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division took Trun, and reconnaissance elements advanced to the edge of St. Lambert. Beside it, the Polish division secured the area around Hordouseaux and Hills 258 and 137, while a reinforced reconnaissance troop probed to within half a mile north of Chambois. The result denied the Germans one of their two main escape routes.¹⁰

On the southern shoulder of the gap, General Gerow's V Corps had launched its attack on 18 August. Gerow had instructed the 2d French Armored Division on the left to hold firmly to the Ecouché–Argentan line, in order to

⁹ *AGp B Tagesmeldung*, dated 19 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

¹⁰ Two main sources have been used for the action on the northern flank: Canadian Opns; 1. *Dywizja Pancerna w Walce* (*The First Armored Division in Battle*) (Brussels: La Colonne, Ltd., 1947) (hereafter cited as *1st Polish Armored Division*), pp. 67–70, 91–103. Mr. Wsevolod Aglaimoff kindly made available the information published in the Polish language.

⁸ Model's Rpt to Jodl, 18 Aug, *OB WEST KTB*, *Anlagen*, p. 1513.

prevent the Germans from breaking out of the impending trap, and assist the corps attack by fire. In the center, between Argentan and le Bourg-St.-Léonard, the 80th Division was to commit the 318th Infantry in a thrust designed to bypass Argentan on the east, cut the Argentan-Trun road, and enter Argentan from the northeast.¹¹ On the right, from a line between le Bourg-St.-Léonard and Exmes, the 90th Division was to drive north to capture high ground near Chambois. Fifteen artillery battalions were to lend support.¹²

The 318th Infantry, 80th Division, made no progress against strong German resistance. Occupying rising ground and possessing superior observation, the Germans knocked out four Sherman tanks with their first few antitank shells. Their artillery and machine gun fire inflicted severe casualties on the infantry. General McBride called off the attack and requested the artillery fire of seven supporting battalions in an attempt to reduce the German defenses before trying to advance again.¹³

The 90th Division had more, but not complete, success. Moving cross-country, American infantrymen outflanked resistance astride the le Bourg-St.-Léonard-Chambois road, then cut the road about half way to Chambois.¹⁴ Morn-

ing mist rising from patches of damp and densely thicketed forests hampered the troops at first. Later, thick smoke from smoldering timber set afire by white phosphorus shells obscured their vision. This, plus German fire (particularly of the *8th Werfer* (Rocket) *Brigade*) and defensive action by the *116th Panzer Division*, prevented the 90th from attaining its objective.

The gap on the eastern end of the pocket remained open, and through it that night German headquarters and units escaped. The *116th Panzer Division*, for example, sent trains and artillery through the Trun-Chambois gap. The *LVIII Panzer Corps* headquarters, having fulfilled its mission of regulating traffic over the Orne bridges, moved across the Dives to safety.

Yet the Germans had ample cause for concern. The pocket had been further compressed. "Practically speaking," according to German commanders, "the pocket was closed." With the exception of a narrow belt of woodland running along the watershed between the Orne and Dives River valleys, the terrain offered little cover. The roads were like chalk marks on a billiard table, in plain view of Allied aircraft and artillery observers. During the night of 18 August intense artillery fire suddenly descended on the pocket from all sides in unprecedented volume, and it continued throughout the following day.¹⁵

Outside the *Army Group B* perspec-

¹¹ Only one other regiment of the 80th Division, the 317th, was available to Gerow, and he kept it as his corps reserve. The third regiment, the 319th, was on a separate mission near the Loire River.

¹² V Corps FO 20, 1800, 17 Aug; V Corps Ltr of Instr (Gerow to Leclerc) 18 Aug; Thompson, *Arty Study*.

¹³ 80th Div AAR, Aug; Interv with McHugh, Stockton's Hosp Intervs, Vol. III, GL-93 (235).

¹⁴ Lt. Col. Christian H. Clarke, Jr., though suffering a painful and partially disabling wound, manifested heroic leadership and was awarded the DSC.

¹⁵ MS # A-919 (Gersdorff); see Telecon, Gersdorff and Speidel, 2020, 20 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; Commandant Richard Mouton, "Le Piège se Referme à Chambois," in Herval, *Bataille de Normandie*, I, 416; Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946, p. 67.

tive, events in the west were also having their effect on higher levels, and on 18 August Hitler issued an order to amplify his instructions of the 16th, instructions that applied to the situation in southern France. On 16 August, a day after the Allied invasion of southern France, Hitler had ordered all noncombat troops of *Army Group G* west of the line Orléans–Clermont-Ferrand–Montpellier to begin moving northeastward to the Seine–Yonne River line. This order affected neither the combat troops of the *Nineteenth Army* opposing the Allied Mediterranean landings nor the fortress troops on the Atlantic coast. On 18 August, because developments in the *Army Group B* sector foreshadowed the possibility that the *Nineteenth Army* might be cut off in the near future, Hitler ordered *Army Group G* to disengage its forces in southern France—with the exception of troops at Toulon and Marseille. *Army Group G* was to move to gain contact with the southern flank of *Army Group B* and begin at once to organize a rallying position along a line from Sens through Dijon to the Swiss border. Firm rear-guard action on predetermined lines of resistance was to insure the orderly withdrawal of all troops from southeastern France. The *11th Panzer Division* was to be left in the Rhône River valley as protection against Allied airborne landings and later was to form the rear guard of the *Nineteenth Army*. The progress of pursuing Allied forces was to be impeded to the utmost by demolition and destruction—"not one locomotive, bridge, power station, or repair shop shall fall into enemy hands undestroyed." Fortress areas on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of France were to be defended to the last man,

Marseille and Toulon by a division each.¹⁶

With *Army Groups B* and *G* withdrawing from northwest and southern France by 18 August, Model at midnight, after a day of inspection and conference in the west, assumed command of *OB WEST* and *Army Group B*.¹⁷ His predecessor, Kluge, departed for Germany by automobile.

Shortly before Model's arrival in the west, Kluge had told a colleague, "You may rest assured that I shall talk with him [Hitler] again tonight without mincing any words. Something has to happen. I owe this to the troops and to the German people. One way or another."¹⁸ Relieved of command before he could do so, Kluge nevertheless fulfilled his promise by writing a frank letter to Hitler before his departure. On the road to Metz he then committed suicide, taking potassium cyanide. Hitler at first repressed news of Kluge's death, but soon after he received Kluge's letter he informed important party officials and military authorities of Kluge's suicide.¹⁹ Hitler also advised them that Kluge had admitted his guilt for the defeat in the west. Kluge was buried quietly at home without the public acclamation later accorded Rommel, who, unlike Kluge, was to be forced to take his own life.

¹⁶ Hitler Order, *OKW/WFSt/Op*, 16 Aug. received by *OB WEST* at 0320, 17 Aug, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 252; Hitler Order, 18 Aug, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1499.

¹⁷ *Fifth Pz A KTB, Anlage 40*.

¹⁸ MS # B-807 (Kuntzen).

¹⁹ Telecon, 1710, 20 Aug, *AGp B KTB*. Speidel reported that Kluge had complained on several occasions of dizziness and also that Kluge had seemed deeply affected by the critical situation of the encircled troops and by the fact that his son was among them.

Kluge's letter to Hitler contained neither bitterness nor reproach:

When you receive these lines, I shall be no more. I cannot bear the accusation that I sealed the fate of the West by taking wrong measures. . . . I have never feared death. Life for me, who am already included on the list of war criminals to be surrendered, has no more meaning.

I have been relieved of command. . . . The evident reason is the failure of the armored units in their push to Avranches and the consequent impossibility of closing the gap to the sea. As responsible commander, my "guilt" is thereby affirmed. Allow me, my Fuehrer, to state my position in all deference.

Because of previous combat, Kluge declared, the armored units that had launched the attack toward Avranches had been far too weak to assure success, and even with increased striking power, they would never have regained the sea. Assuming, nevertheless, that Avranches had through some miracle been recaptured, the danger to the army group would have only been postponed, not eliminated. The order to drive to the north from Avranches in an attempt to change the strategic situation in the west had been "*completely* out of the question. . . . Your order, therefore, presupposed a state of affairs that did not exist." The grand and daring operational concept enunciated by Hitler, unfortunately, had been impracticable in execution.

Conceding that it probably would have been better to delay the attack for one day, Kluge contended that such a postponement would not have basically changed the course of events. The units in the west had been forced to become

self-sufficient in men and matériel because the crisis on the Eastern Front had not permitted adequate replacement. Not the failure of the Avranches counterattack but the rapid decline in the number of available tanks and antitank weapons, the insufficient supplies and equipment, and personnel attrition had produced the situation that had culminated in the Argentan-Falaise pocket.

Both Rommel and I, and probably all the leaders here in the West, who have experienced the struggle with the English and Americans and [witnessed] their wealth in matériel, foresaw the development that has now appeared. . . . Our views were *not* dictated by pessimism but by sober recognition of the facts.

Hoping that Model would master the situation, Kluge concluded:

Should the new weapons in which you place so much hope, especially those of the air force, not bring success—then, my Fuehrer, make up your mind to end the war. The German people have suffered so unspeakably that it is time to bring the horror to a close.

I have steadfastly stood in awe of your greatness, your bearing in this gigantic struggle, and your iron will. . . . If Fate is stronger than your will and your genius, that is Destiny. You have made an honorable and tremendous fight. History will testify this for you. Show now that greatness that will be necessary if it comes to the point of ending a struggle which has become hopeless.

I depart from you, my Fuehrer, having stood closer to you in spirit than you perhaps dreamed, in the consciousness of having done my duty to the utmost.²⁰

²⁰ Ltr, Kluge to Hitler, 18 Aug, translated by MIRS London, 28 May 45, CRS Files, EAP 21-X/15; Kluge's Farewell to Hitler, 18 Aug, M.I.-14/7, OCMH Files; see Hodgson's translation in R-58; see also Bormann File on Kluge in OCMH Files. Eberbach believed later that Kluge might have

Neither the letter nor Kluge's suicide affected the course of events. Nor did they bring comfort to Hitler, whose forces in the west were undergoing the destruction incident to defeat.

The Pocket Closed

During the night of 18 August and throughout the next day the *Seventh Army*, with *Panzer Group Eberbach* attached, fell back behind the railroad east of the Falaise-Argentan highway. The pocket was then approximately six miles deep and seven miles wide. Inside were the headquarters of the *Seventh Army*, *Panzer Group Eberbach*, and the *LXXIV* and *LXXXIV Corps*, the *II Parachute* and *XLVII Panzer Corps*; the remnants of six infantry divisions still operating as entities: the *84th*, *276th*, *277th*, *326th*, *353d*, and *363d*; one parachute division, the *3d*; three panzer divisions, the *12th SS*, *2d*, and *116th*; perhaps two more panzer divisions, the *1st SS* and *10th SS*; a number of splinter groups of divisions that had ceased to exist as tactical units and that had been absorbed by other divisions or amalgamated into *kampfgruppen*; and a mass of stragglers, service elements, and trains—all compressed within an area that lay entirely under the watchful eye and effective fire of Allied artillery and air.²¹

averted the defeat in August by disobeying Hitler and withdrawing to the Seine at the beginning of the month, but Eberbach conceded that Kluge was being watched so closely after the July 20th *Putsch* that a false step would have resulted in his immediate relief and the substitution of a more manageable commander. MS # A-922 (Eberbach).

²¹ The *LVIII Panzer Corps* headquarters was near Vimoutiers. (Radio Msg, *LVIII Pz Corps* to *Seventh Army*, 0330, 19 Aug, *Seventh Army KTB*, *Anlagen*.) Eberbach himself was at the *II SS Pan-*

Getting across the Dives River was the next step in the withdrawal operation, but with the exit from the pocket in imminent danger of being closed by Allied pincers at Trun and Chambois, Hausser, the *Seventh Army* commander, came to the conclusion that he would have to fight his way across the Dives and out of the pocket that night—not an easy matter.²² Daylight movements were extremely costly. All the roads leading to the Dives were clogged with the wreckage of vehicles and armament of every kind. Though distances separating headquarters were short, chaotic conditions made communications precarious. For example, the *LXXIV Corps*, which was holding the northwestern sector of the pocket, was out of touch with army headquarters. At 1130 on 19 August the corps dispatched a radio message reporting its dispositions, requesting urgently information on the general situation and its own combat mission, and stating that it was out of contact with two of its divisions (the *84th* and *363d*, still west of the railroad early that morning, about six miles from the corps command post). This message reached the army headquarters by some round-about way two hours later, even though the straight-line distance between the corps and army command posts was little

zer Corps command post in the Vimoutiers area. The *I SS Panzer Corps*, split in two by the attacks of the Canadian and Polish armored divisions, was trying to hold the line north of the Allied penetration with what remained of its units east of the Dives River.

²² Sources for the German action include MS # B-824 (Straube), MS # B-610 (Viebig), MS # B-526 (Badinski), MS # P-179 (Nettmann), MS # P-169 (Fiebig), MS # B-163 (Dettling), MS # A-968 (Elfeldt), MS # B-784 (Criegern), MS # A-985 (Mahlmann), MS # P-164 (Meyer).

more than three miles.²³ Handicapped by communications difficulties, Hausser tried to give his instructions on the forthcoming operation personally to his corps commanders. On that day he was able to visit three of his four corps headquarters.

The Dives River itself was not considered a serious obstacle, but the main Allied opposition was expected to be met along the east bank. According to fragmentary intelligence available inside the pocket, a small opening on the eastern edge of the pocket was supposed to exist along the river south of Trun; farther south toward Chambois the situation was not at all clear.

Hausser intended to break out of the encirclement by means of a two-corps attack. The *II Parachute Corps* was to thrust across the Dives River south of Trun, the *XLVII Panzer Corps* to cross farther south near Chambois. The *II SS Panzer Corps* was to render assistance from outside the pocket by launching a supporting attack with two divisions from Vimoutiers toward the Trun-Chambois area, thereby opening a path for the *Seventh Army* escape. The *II SS Panzer Corps* attack had originally been planned for 19 August, but Allied fighter-bombers prevented the air delivery of necessary supplies, and the attack was postponed until the morning of 20 August.²⁴ Thus Hausser's forces would be on their own in the initial stage of the breakout scheduled for the night of 19 August.

The preparations for the effort took

all day. About 0700 that morning Hausser had arrived at the *II Parachute Corps* headquarters. Meindl, the corps commander, interpreted such an early visit as a bad omen, and he greeted Hausser with: "I presume the lid is on [the kettle—the German word for pocket in the military sense] and we shall probably have to try to break out." Hausser replied that that indeed was the matter he had come to discuss.

After Hausser indicated his ideas, Meindl formulated his *II Parachute Corps* plan. With his two divisions, the *3d Parachute* and *353d*, he proposed to break through the Allied lines between Trun and Chambois, secure the Mt. Ormel hill mass three to four miles the other side of the Dives, turn about on that dominating ground, and, facing west, keep the breach open for troops following. From a line of departure near la Londe and starting at 2230, the four regiments of the *3d Parachute Division* were to advance cross-country on compass azimuths toward Coudehard and the Mt. Ormel hill mass, seven miles away. The paratroopers were to move on two axes, with two regiments on the left, one on the right, and the fourth covering the rear. They were to cross the Dives south of Magny, then move to seize the northern part of the Ormel ridge. Exploiting the cover of darkness to the utmost, the paratroopers were to advance "Indian fashion," as noiselessly as possible. No fire was to be opened before dawn. Because of gasoline shortages, artillerymen were to expend their remaining ammunition during the day, then destroy their pieces. A few anti-tank and 88-mm. antiaircraft guns, provided with gasoline, were to accompany the troops. Similarly, the *353d Division*

²³ Msg. 1130, 19 Aug. *Seventh Army KTB, Anlagen*.

²⁴ *AGp B Tagesmeldung*, 19 Aug, dated 0215, 20 Aug, and *Telecon, II Fighter Corps CofS* and *AGp B Ia/F*, 1500, 19 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.



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on the right was to break out across the Dives near St. Lambert and Chambois, then seize the southern portion of Mt. Ormel.

Hausser approved Meindl's plan. He also issued his order for the *XLVII Panzer Corps* attack. To give the *II Parachute Corps*' penetration by stealth a better chance of success, Hausser instructed the *XLVII Panzer Corps* to start its attack no earlier than midnight—this would serve to keep from arousing prematurely Allied vigilance and countermeasures. The *XLVII Panzer Corps* was to assemble the *1st SS* and *2d Panzer Divisions* (perhaps also remnants of the *10th SS Panzer Division*) in the Forêt de Gouffern, and break out in the St. Lambert–Chambois area. The *116th*

Panzer Division, holding the line along the Argentan–Chambois road, was to cover the rear and, on order, follow the other divisions out.²⁵

The *LXXIV Corps*, holding the northwestern part of the pocket perimeter with five divisions (the *277th*, *276th*, *326th*, *84th*, and *363d*—the latter two still west of the railroad), had the mission of protecting the rear of the breakout operation in its sector. The corps was then to move through the breach and out.

The *LXXXIV Corps*, having passed its last division, the *353d*, to the control of the *II Parachute Corps* on the previous

²⁵ Hausser to Model, 0930, 19 Aug, *Seventh Army KTB, Anlagen*; MS # A-923 (Meindl); see also MS # A-904 (Luettwitz) and MS # B-162 (Mueller).

day, had neither units nor a mission on the morning of 19 August. Shortly before noon Elfeldt, the corps commander, received the order to break through the Allied lines near Trun with the few remaining elements of the *12th SS Panzer* and *277th Divisions*, which were to be pulled out of the front. Convinced that unfavorable terrain and strong concentrations of Allied forces around Trun precluded success, Elfeldt, with Meindl's support, obtained a change in mission. With remnants of only the *12th SS Panzer Division* under his command, he was to protect the north flank of Meindl's *II Parachute Corps*, then move behind the paratroopers across the Dives River. The *LXXIV Corps* was to follow.

Because of communications difficulties, it took the better part of the day, and in some instances most of the night, for all orders to reach subordinate units.

As darkness fell on 19 August, the pocket contracted still more. The units along the railroad pulled back to the forests of Feuillet and Gouffern. The *84th* and *363d Divisions*, which had held the most western positions during the day, moved through the new rear-guard outposts and into the Bois de Feuillet, there to assemble and make ready to follow the forces charged with making the breakout.

Meanwhile, British troops crossed the Orne River and moved eastward to within a few miles of the Falaise-Argentan highway.

While the Germans inside the pocket readied themselves for what was to be the last act of the Argentan-Falaise drama, the deterioration of the situation on the *Fifth Panzer Army* front approached a climax on 19 August. The *LXXXVI Corps* line was breached in

two places, and Livarot on the extreme left flank was lost. Farther south, that part of the greatly weakened *I SS Panzer Corps* still east of the Dives River was unable to check the advance of the two armored divisions of the *2d Canadian Corps*.

These divisions, one Canadian, the other Polish, continued to raise havoc with the Germans. Some elements of the *4th Canadian Armoured Division* at Trun crossed to the west bank of the Dives River. In the northeastern part of St. Lambert, a small force of about 175 men, 15 tanks, and 4 self-propelled antitank guns held doggedly against repeated attacks by German units that tried desperately to keep the escape route through St. Lambert open. Reconnaissance elements advanced to the vicinity of Moissy, and an armored brigade was present in the Hordouseaux-Ecorches area.

To strengthen the northern jaw of the closing pincers, the *3d Canadian Infantry Division* deployed along the eastern bank of the Dives River between Beauvais and Trun, while an infantry brigade of the *4th Armoured Division* closed to the Trun-Vimoutiers highway between Trun and Hordouseaux.

Meanwhile, the *1st Polish Armored Division* was advancing on two axes over difficult tank terrain infested with enemy troops. The bulk of the division, on the left, moved from the area around Hill 258 toward Mt. Ormel. This prominent ridge about two miles long straddles the Chambois-Vimoutiers highway and dominates the countryside for miles. By noon of 19 August the forward units were approaching the northern extremity of the ridge, Hill 262. After a short fight they occupied it.

Moving southward along the ridge, Polish tanks surprised a long column of German vehicles and armor moving bumper to bumper on the Chambois–Vimoutiers highway. The Poles opened fire and destroyed the column. Dense smoke from the burning vehicles spread over a large area in the dusk and reduced visibility to such an extent that further advance that day to the next objective—another Hill 262 on the southern end of the ridge—was impossible. By midnight two Polish armored regiments and three battalions of motorized infantry were concentrated on the northern end of the Mt. Ormel ridge and were making ready to resume the advance the next morning. Thus, when Meindl's breakout attack got under way, an important part of his objective was already in Polish hands.

On the Polish right, two armored regiments reinforced with a troop of antitank guns had started about 1100 from the vicinity of Ecorches toward Chambois. After reaching a hill less than a mile north of Chambois, and after being joined in the afternoon by the division reconnaissance regiment, the group launched an attack on the town from the northeast—astride the Vimoutiers–Chambois highway. The approaches to Chambois were littered and the streets literally choked by the debris of German wreckage, which proved a greater obstruction to progress than did enemy resistance. A small detachment working its way into Chambois from the south finally reached the main intersection of the town late in the afternoon. There it met Company G of the 90th Division's 359th Infantry, which had entered the town from the southwest.

The American troops had reached

Chambois on the second day of Gerow's V Corps attack on the southern shoulder of the gap between Argentan and Exmes. General Gerow had released his corps reserve, the 317th Infantry, to its parent unit, the 80th Division, and General McBride had committed it with the 318th. Though still unable to enter Argentan, 80th Division troops cut the Argentan–Trun road. On the corps right General McLain's 90th Division, reinforced by French tankers, continued to drive toward Chambois, an objective reached in late afternoon. The village was in flames, and everywhere there was an unbearable stench of death and burned flesh, an unbelievable clutter of dead Germans, dead horses, and destroyed equipment.²⁶

While Americans and Poles cleaned out the last defenders of Chambois, commanders of the Polish group and the American 2d Battalion, 359th Infantry, met and worked out a plan for the common defense of the town. The Poles handed over to the Americans about 1,300 prisoners as well as their own wounded because they lacked facilities for them. Tired, short of ammunition and supplies, the Polish units in Chambois were cut off from their rear.

Thus the long-sought juncture of Allied forces to close the pocket occurred. The closure, however, was of the most tenuous sort. Trun and Chambois were both firmly in Allied hands, and a small Canadian force held part of

²⁶ Msg. Gerow to Hodges, 2005, 19 Aug; [Alpert]. Notes. For his part in the capture of Chambois, Capt. Edward R. Lienhart was awarded the DSC. Pfc. George J. Caldwell and Pfc. Walter C. Giebelstein, working together as a bazooka team, destroyed four tanks with five rounds of ammunition, and were also awarded the DSC.