

pocket that had obviously become necessary.<sup>51</sup>

At 1245 Kluge telephoned Jodl and again set forth his estimate of the situation. Unquestionably, Jodl admitted, the armies had to be withdrawn eastward. But it seemed to him that a withdrawal was feasible only if the escape opening were enlarged, and this could be done only by an attack to the southeast.

Kluge was direct and to the point. He believed it impossible to comply with Hitler's wish as expressed in Hitler's directive to Hausser. An attack southeastward through Argentan and Sées was out of the question. "No matter how many orders are issued," Kluge said, "the troops cannot, are not able to, are not strong enough to defeat the enemy. It would be a fateful error to succumb to a hope that cannot be fulfilled, and no power in this world [can accomplish its will simply] through an order it may give. That is the situation."

Jodl assured Kluge that he understood perfectly. A concise and clear directive from the Fuehrer, he said, would be sent to Kluge in the shortest possible time.<sup>52</sup>

Twenty minutes later Speidel telephoned Kluge to report information to the effect that a directive from Hitler

would shortly arrive in the field. Presumably it would give Kluge full freedom of action. Since Jodl had agreed that withdrawal was necessary, Kluge directed Speidel to prepare immediately the draft of a withdrawal order for *Seventh Army*. The *Seventh Army* was to begin withdrawing on the following morning. Hausser was to pull two divisions out of the front at once and dispatch them to the *Fifth Panzer Army*, which had lost two divisions in two days of fierce combat. The *II SS Panzer Corps* headquarters was to be made subordinate to *Panzer Group Eberbach* so that Eberbach could exercise better control over the many splinter units assigned to him. How to get the *Seventh Army* back across the Orne was the most troublesome problem of the withdrawal. The movement of supplies westward into the pocket was already virtually impossible. Tanks were being abandoned for lack of fuel. The bridges over the Orne were not suitable for heavy traffic. Because antiaircraft protection was generally inadequate, Allied air attacks on massed vehicles at the Orne River crossing sites could create insurmountable difficulties. For these reasons it was necessary to provide for the strict regulation of traffic during the withdrawal. The *Seventh Army* was to be charged with this job. Since the most difficult part of the withdrawal would be across the Orne River itself, Kluge wanted a corps headquarters that had no other assignment to take charge of traffic control over the Orne; he designated the *LVIII Panzer Corps* for the task.<sup>53</sup>

An hour and a half later, at 1439,

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<sup>51</sup> Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 1135, 16 Aug, *AGp B KTB*; Telecon, Kluge and Blumentritt, 1155, 16 Aug, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1450. Blumentritt and Speidel spoke on the telephone around noon and speculated on the withdrawal movement. Speidel expressed the opinion, and Blumentritt was apparently in agreement, that the withdrawal had to be carried out to the Dives River-Laigle line. Telecon, Blumentritt and Speidel, 1210, 16 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>52</sup> Telecon, Kluge and Jodl, 1245, 16 Aug, *Fifth Pz A KTB, Anlage 24*.

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<sup>53</sup> Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 1305, 16 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

though Hitler's directive had still not arrived in the west, Kluge issued his withdrawal order. The armies were to withdraw behind the Orne River during two successive nights, starting that night. Two divisions of the *Seventh Army* were to be disengaged and dispatched to the *Fifth Panzer Army* as rapidly as possible to assist in the Falaise area. *Panzer Group Eberbach* was to cover the withdrawal by launching attacks in the Argentan area. Eberbach was to be ready to send two panzer divisions under *II SS Panzer Corps* eastward to the Vimoutiers area, where it was to remain at the disposal of the army group.<sup>54</sup>

Two hours afterwards, Hitler's order arrived. It authorized *Army Group B* to withdraw its forces that were west of the Dives River. The movement eastward was to be made in two stages: across the Orne River, then across the Dives. Junction with the *LXXXI Corps* was to be made near Gacé. Hitler emphasized two requirements: Falaise had to be strongly held as a "corner pillar," and the Argentan-Falaise gap had to be enlarged by an attack launched by *Panzer Group Eberbach* toward the southeast.<sup>55</sup>

There was nothing in Hitler's order that had not previously been considered and discussed more than once in the headquarters along the chain of command. Withdrawal behind the Dives

<sup>54</sup> *AGp B* Order, 1439, 16 Aug, *AGp B Op. Befehle*. Because it seemed that the large number of divisions could not be brought across the few available Orne River bridges in two days' time, Kluge later amended his order to allow a third day if necessary. Telecon, Kluge and Speidel, 1700, 16 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>55</sup> Telecon, Blumentritt and Speidel, 1645, 16 Aug, *AGp B KTB*, Hitler Order, 1555 (?), 16 Aug, *OB WEST KTB, Anlagen*, p. 1457.

River had been contemplated, and the necessity of holding the Falaise shoulder of the gap was self-evident. While Jodl's concept of enlarging the escape corridor by Eberbach's attack to the southeast was theoretically sound, no means existed to carry out the attack. Yet Hitler and Jodl both refused to accept this hard fact despite irrefutable evidence presented by the commanders in the field. By 16 August, with the loss of Falaise that day the most dramatic illustration of the shrinking pocket, the commanders found themselves not only virtually surrounded by a contracting enclosure but also threatened with being engulfed by crumbling walls. Furthermore, their only escape route was in imminent danger of being blocked.

The decision to withdraw having finally been made, the Germans began to pull out of the pocket after dark on 16 August.

#### *The Allied Decision to Close the Pocket*

Having halted the XV Corps just south of Argentan on 13 August, General Bradley made another decision on the following day. Without consulting General Montgomery, he decided to retain only part of the XV Corps at Argentan while sending the rest to the east toward the Seine River (and across it if possible), with Dreux the first objective.

The reasons for Bradley's action were clear. The apparent scarcity of enemy forces between Argentan and the Seine seemed to warrant a thrust to the eastern boundary of the OVERLORD lodgment area. There seemed no need to retain a large force at Argentan, for "due to the delay in closing the gap between Argen-

tan and Falaise"—by implication the fault of the Canadians who had not reached the army group boundary as the Americans had—it appeared that "many of the German divisions which were in the pocket have now escaped." On the basis of Montgomery's directive of 11 August, which had stated that the wider envelopment to the Seine would be in order if the Germans evaded encirclement at Argentan and Falaise, an eastward drive seemed justifiable. It was true that the Mayenne gap on the left of the XV Corps appeared to be well on its way to elimination, and the XV Corps could have therefore attacked northward through Argentan with greater security on 14 August. But since Montgomery had had twenty-four hours to order a resumption of the XV Corps advance to Argentan and farther north and had not done so, Bradley felt he need not hold all his forces in place. He decided to keep two divisions of the XV Corps at Argentan and to reinforce them with the 80th Division. These units, "together with the VII Corps," he thought, "will be sufficient for the southern jaw of the trap."<sup>56</sup>

Patton received word of the decision by telephone, and on 14 August instructed General Haislip to go eastward with part of his XV Corps. Haislip alerted his two divisions on the right—the 5th Armored and 79th Infantry—for the movement. The 79th Division, assembled between Alençon and Mortagne, had been out of contact with the enemy since moving north from le Mans in the wake of the 5th Armored Di-

<sup>56</sup> 12th AGp Dir for Current Ops, 15 Aug (the quotations above are from this document); Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 378-79; 21 AGp Dir, M-518, 11 Aug.

vision—though on 14 August a small part of the 79th hunted down and destroyed about fifty German tracked vehicles trying to escape eastward from the Forêt d'Ecouves toward Mortagne. The division made ready to depart the area on the following day. To free the 5th Armored Division, the 2d French Armored Division extended its lines eastward to cover the southern exits from Argentan, and the 90th, which had followed the French from le Mans to Alençon, took positions east of Argentan along the le Bourg-St.-Léonard-Exmes road.

On 15 August the two departing divisions drove toward Dreux, followed by the XV Corps headquarters and artillery. A skeleton corps staff remained at Alençon to conduct the holding operation that had devolved upon the 2d French Armored, the 90th, and the 80th Divisions.<sup>57</sup>

Deployed along the Ecouché-Exmes line, the 2d French Armored and 90th Infantry Divisions held the southern shoulder of the Argentan-Falaise gap, while the 80th Division prepared to move north from the Evron area to bolster them. The two divisions on line kept the east-west roads through Argentan under constant interdiction fire and shelled particularly the Argentan-Laigle highway, a vital traffic artery toward Paris and the Seine. Argentan itself, burning since 13 August, remained in German hands.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> TUSA Dir to XV Corps (signed Brig. Gen. Hobart R. Gay), 14 Aug, and Dir, 15 Aug (confirming oral orders, 14 Aug); Telecon, Gaffey and Menoher, 2145, 14 Aug, XV Corps CofS Jnl and File; XV Corps and 79th and 90th Div AAR's, Aug.

<sup>58</sup> Rousseau, *Bataille de Normandie*, pp. 40 and 12 (the latter "new pages"); see also Xavier Rousseau, "Souffrances d'Argentan," in Herval, *Bataille*

As though confirming American estimates that most of the Germans had already escaped the Argentan-Falaise pocket, contact along the Ecouché-Exmes line slackened on 15 August.<sup>59</sup> Patton on the following day ordered the 90th Division commander, General McLain, to dispatch a force to the town of Gacé on 17 August to find out what was there. Sixteen miles east of Argentan, Gacé would give the 90th Division control of a hill mass dominating the terrain to the north and northeast and would deny the Germans an important road center on the escape routes north to Lisieux and northeast to Bernay and Rouen. But before the 90th Division could act, the Germans broke the comparative calm that had existed. Contingents of the 2d SS and 116th *Panzer Divisions* launched an attack on the afternoon of 16 August against 90th Division roadblocks at the village of le Bourg-St.-Léonard.<sup>60</sup>

Six miles east of Argentan, little more than three miles south of Chambois, and at the southeastern edge of the Forêt de Gouffern, le Bourg-St.-Léonard is on the crest of the ridge forming the watershed between the Orne and the Dives River valleys. A narrow belt of woods running along the ridge line from Falaise to le Bourg-St.-Léonard offered the retreating Germans good concealment and a staging area for an attempt to break out of encirclement. But the Argentan plain to the southwest and the Dives River valley to the northeast, over which

the German troops had to move on their way out of the pocket, was open land almost devoid of cover. The dominating terrain near le Bourg-St.-Léonard provided excellent observation over a large part of the Dives River valley, where the last battle of the Argentan-Falaise pocket was to be fought.

The attack against the 90th Division opened Kluge's planned withdrawal to the Seine, and it drove the 90th off the ridge. Though American infantry supported by tanks retook both le Bourg-St.-Léonard and the ridge after dark, action there had not yet ended. The fight for possession of this tactically important terrain feature was to continue for another twenty-four hours.

The German attack was something new, something quite different from the rather disorganized forces the 90th Division had scattered and destroyed during the preceding days. It became apparent, contrary to earlier intelligence estimates, that a large proportion of the German forces still remained in the Argentan-Falaise pocket.<sup>61</sup> Closing the gap by the joint effort of Canadian and American forces thus became even more urgent than before.<sup>62</sup>

Closing the gap on 16 August was bound to be more difficult, not only because of the German withdrawal of the Mortain salient and the concentration of German troops at the shoulders but also because of the reduction of forces at Argentan in favor of the drive to the

*de Normandie*, I, 396-411; XV and 5th Armd Div AAR's, Aug; Interv with Capt Ernest Rothemberger, Stockton's Hosp Intervs, ML-2234.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, XV Corps G-2 Per Rpt 12, 0300, 15 Aug, and 90th Div AAR, Aug.

<sup>60</sup> 90th Div AAR, Aug; MS # B-179 (Hausser).

<sup>61</sup> See Magna Bauer, Major Shifts of Divisions Made by the Germans to and Within the German Normandy Front Between 30 July and 25 August 1944, and the Significance of These Movements in View of Allied Strategy, R-33, OCMH Files.

<sup>62</sup> Eisenhower to Marshall, CPA 9-0228, 17 Aug, Pogue Files.



LE BOURG-ST.-LÉONARD and the terrain across which the Germans ultimately withdrew from the Argentan-Falaise pocket.

Seine. Four divisions and twenty-two battalions of artillery had been in the vicinity of Argentan on 14 August, but two divisions and fifteen artillery battalions had departed on the following day.<sup>63</sup> On 16 August, when the Germans began their withdrawal across the length of the American front, it was doubtful that the American forces around Argentan were strong enough to hold the shoulder. Two divisions and seven artillery battalions were on the Ecouché-Exmes line; the 80th Division was still southwest of Alençon, a considerable distance away.

Yet on that day Montgomery phoned Bradley to suggest a meeting of Canadians and Americans, not somewhere between Falaise and Argentan, but seven miles northeast of Argentan, near Trun and Chambois.<sup>64</sup>

In compliance with Montgomery's suggestion, Bradley ordered Patton to launch a drive northeastward from the Ecouché-Exmes line to seize Chambois and Trun and make contact with the Canadians. The departure of the XV Corps meant the absence of a headquarters in the Argentan area to co-ordinate the divisions on the southern shoulder of the gap. Earlier that day, Patton had alerted McBride, the 80th Division commander and the senior officer in the area,

<sup>63</sup> Royce L. Thompson, A Statistical Study of the Artillery Battalions at the Argentan-Falaise Pocket (hereafter cited as Thompson, Arty Study), OCMH Files.

<sup>64</sup> Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 379. The date of the telephone call has been inferred from internal evidence; see also Patton, *War as I Knew It*, p. 109, and Pogue, *Supreme Command*, p. 214.

to be ready to take command if necessary in a defensive situation. But this was hardly practical for the offensive action ordered by Bradley. Patton thus directed McBride to move the 80th forward to join the goth Division and the 2d French Armored Division.<sup>65</sup> He then created a provisional corps under command of his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, for the purpose of getting the drive under way at once.<sup>66</sup>

With four officers comprising his staff, General Gaffey arrived near Alençon on 16 August, set up a command post, established communications with the three divisions comprising his command, and soon after midnight issued an attack order. He directed the 2d French Armored Division to send one combat command west of Argentan to cut the Argentan-Falaise road; the goth Division to take Chambois and establish a bridge-head over the Dives River there; the French to pass another combat command through the goth to capture Trun; the 80th Division to move to an assembly area south of Argentan.<sup>67</sup>

All units were to be ready to attack by 1000, 17 August. But before they jumped off, a new corps commander arrived on the scene. The attack did not get under way as scheduled.

<sup>65</sup> Earlier that day the 80th Division had been alerted for movement southeast to Châteaudun, not far from Orléans, there to become the Third Army reserve. 80th Div FO 5, 0200, 16 Aug.

<sup>66</sup> TUSA Ltr, Provisional Corps, 16 Aug.

<sup>67</sup> Third Army Provisional Corps Ops Order 1.

<sup>17</sup> Aug; see [1st Lt. Hollis Alpert], Notes on the Closing of the Chambois Gap (hereafter cited as [Alpert], Notes), OCMH Files.

## CHAPTER XXVII

# Closing the Pocket

### *The Beginning of the End*

When the Germans began their withdrawal on the night of 16 August, the bulk of the depleted forces of *Army Group B* were west of the Dives River and inside the Argentan–Falaise pocket. Elements of the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies* and of *Panzer Group Eberbach*—comprising four panzer corps, two army corps, and one parachute corps—seemed about to be trapped. (*Map XI*)

Only two army corps, both under the *Fifth Panzer Army*, were outside the pocket, and they held the rest of the army group front, to the north and east of the pocket. On the north and facing generally west was the *LXXXVI Corps* (with three infantry divisions), deployed east of the Dives River on a 25-mile front from the coast to a point south of St. Pierre-sur-Dives; its left flank, badly shattered by Canadian Army attacks during the past few days, had no contact with the *1 SS Panzer Corps*. East of the pocket and facing generally south was the *LXXXI Corps* (with two infantry divisions on the flanks and an improvised kampfgruppe in the center), stretched along a 70-mile front from Gacé to Ram-bouillet.

The pocket itself was shaped like an elongated letter U lying on its side, the open part on the Dives River, the curvature near Flers. The shortest possible

road distance from the westernmost part of the pocket near Flers to the town of Trun, near the center of the gap on the east, was close to 40 miles. The width of the corridor averaged somewhere between 11 and 15 miles, which meant that most of the ground inside the pocket was within range of Allied artillery fire.

The Germans judged they needed three nights to get the westernmost forces across the Orne River, one more night to complete the withdrawal behind the Dives. Thus the outcome of the withdrawal operation would depend on whether the crumbling shoulders of the gap could be held and the exit kept open for four days.

The withdrawal started quietly after dark on 16 August. That night the westernmost forces moved back to the Orne River. The Allies interfered very little, and the movement was orderly. The troops then prepared to start crossing the Orne on the following night, the *II Parachute* and *LXXXIV Corps* making ready to defend the river line and cover the withdrawal of the *1st SS* and *2d Panzer Divisions* of *Panzer Group Eberbach*.

The comparative calm accompanying the beginning of the withdrawal did not last, for events on 17 August hastened the deterioration of the German situation. On that day Montgomery telephoned Crerar's First Canadian Army to

direct increased pressure on the pocket from the north. Among other instructions Montgomery relayed to Crerar's chief of staff by telephone was a specific order: "It is absolutely essential that both armoured divisions of the 2d Canadian Corps, i.e. 4th Canadian Armoured Division and 1st Polish Armoured Division, close the gap between First Canadian Army and Third U.S. Army. 1st Polish Armoured Division must thrust on past Trun to Chambois at all costs, and as quickly as possible."<sup>1</sup>

Three things happened as a result. First, east of the Dives, part of the *LXXXVI Corps* left flank was forced back behind the Viette River. Second, the two armored divisions of the 2d Canadian Corps, the 4th Canadian on the right, the 1st Polish on the left, struck the weakened *I SS Panzer Corps*. Advancing roughly parallel to the Dives River, the armored divisions broke through the German line and reached positions little more than a mile from the Trun-Vimoutiers highway, less than two miles north of Trun. Third, another penetration southwest of Falaise presented a potential threat to the *Seventh Army* right rear.

To deal with these developments, elements of the 2d SS and 9th SS *Panzer Divisions* of the *II SS Panzer Corps*, moving to Vimoutiers in army group reserve, were committed against the Allied penetration at Trun, and the *Seventh Army* was ordered to accelerate its withdrawal across the Orne River.

The departure of the *II SS Panzer*

*Corps* had already created a precarious situation on the German southern flank, where the 116th *Panzer Division* and elements of the 2d SS *Panzer Division* (the latter at le Bourg-St.-Léonard) were holding the gap open. Units of both German divisions had attacked and taken le Bourg-St.-Léonard on the previous day, only to be pushed off the ridge. But at dawn of 17 August they attacked again with infantry, armor, and artillery well massed. Again they drove 90th Division troops from the village and ridge. Heavy fighting continued throughout the day, this time the Germans retaining possession of the high ground.

The situation there might have been quite different had General Gaffey's provisional corps launched its attack to seize Chambois. But before Gaffey's operation could get under way, another officer appeared on the scene with authority to take command of the forces on the Argentan-Exmes line. He was General Gerow, commander of the V Corps.

The V Corps, under First Army command, had been pinched out near Tinchebray on 15 August and had no further immediate combat mission. When General Montgomery made known by telephone on the following day his intention to close the pocket at Trun and Chambois, the availability of the V Corps headquarters made it an obvious choice to take charge of the divisions around Argentan. General Bradley therefore ordered General Hodges to send General Gerow to the southern shoulder of the gap. General Patton, apparently not informed of this arrangement, had meanwhile sent General Gaffey to the area.

Gerow, on the evening of 16 August, had received a telephone call instructing

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Mil Hq Hist Sec Rpt No. 146, Opns of the First Canadian Army in North-West Europe, 31 Jul-1 Oct 44 (hereafter cited as Canadian Opns), ML-2250.

him to report immediately, with several key officers, to First Army headquarters. He took eight officers with him. Travelling in three jeeps, they reached their destination shortly after midnight and found the tent that housed the war room a beehive of activity.

Hodges and his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. William B. Kean, informed Gerow that he (Gerow) was to assume command at once of three divisions near Argentan and to close the Argentan-Falaise gap. "Where are those divisions?" Gerow asked. No one knew exactly. Nor could anyone tell him anything about the enemy situation there.

Shortly after midnight, in the midst of a heavy rain, Gerow and his staff departed in search of the three divisions. By daybreak on 17 August Gerow was in his new area. He set up a command post in the Hôtel de France at Alençon and located General Gaffey. Messages to the First and Third Armies soon clarified the matter of command. Bradley shifted the army boundary to place Trun and Chambois in the First Army zone of advance. The provisional corps headquarters was disbanded. Because the V Corps Artillery was moving from Tinchebray to the Argentan area on 17 August, Gerow postponed the attack toward Chambois and Trun until the following morning.

For this attack General Gerow wanted the le Bourg-St.-Léonard ridge as the line of departure. Though General McLain proposed to recapture the village and ridge as part of his effort on 18 August, Gerow insisted on having the high ground before the attack. In compliance, the 90th Division attacked after dark, re-entered the village at midnight,

and secured the jump-off positions Gerow wanted.<sup>2</sup>

The German situation on the southern shoulder of the gap was further aggravated that evening of 17 August, for the 116th Panzer Division received orders to relieve the 2d SS Panzer Division troops near le Bourg-St.-Léonard so the latter could rejoin the II SS Panzer Corps at Vimoutiers. The relief was accomplished during the night by committing the last 116th Panzer Division reserve—a reconnaissance battalion about eighty men strong.

Meanwhile, Kluge had outlined and made known his future intentions in a warning order to his army commanders. The armies, after crossing the Orne River, were to fall back without delay to the Dives River-Morteaux-Trun-Gacé-Laigle line. There *Panzer Group Eberbach* was to be disbanded. The *Seventh Army* was to assume responsibility for the front between the seacoast and Laigle. The *Fifth Panzer Army*, with Eberbach again in command, was to take the sector from Laigle to the vicinity of the Eure River just west of Paris.<sup>3</sup>

Kluge was not to remain in command much longer. Model arrived on the

<sup>2</sup> Interv by Col S. L. A. Marshall with Lt Gen Leonard T. Gerow, 12 Sep 45, quoted in [Alpert], Notes; *V Corps Operations in the ETO*, pp. 181-86; 12th AGp Ltr and Ltr of Instrs, both 17 Aug; Msg, Col James H. Hagan to Gen Haislip, 0750, 17 Aug, and Memo, Hagan for Menoher, 0025, 17 Aug; XV Corps CofS Jnl and File; Sylvan Diary, 16 Aug. For their inspiring and heroic leadership at le Bourg-St.-Léonard, Brig. Gen. William G. Weaver and Maj. Leroy R. Pond were awarded the Oak Leaf Cluster to the DSC, and Maj. Robert H. Schulz and Lt. Col. George B. Randolph were awarded the DSC, the latter posthumously.

<sup>3</sup> Kluge to Dietrich, Haussner, and Eberbach, 1430, 17 Aug, *AGp B Op. Befehle*.

17th with instructions from Hitler to relieve Kluge and become *OB WEST* and *Army Group B* commander as soon as he was familiar with the situation. Model's arrival in the west was not altogether surprising. Hitler had not granted Kluge the free hand that Jodl had seemed to promise. Furthermore, Hitler had advised Kluge to stay personally out of the pocket. While this could have reflected perhaps nothing more than concern for Kluge's well-being, it could also be interpreted as virtual confinement to quarters, an attempt to keep the commander in chief in the west away from the temptation of making contact with the Allied command for the purpose of arranging an armistice.<sup>4</sup>

Developments on higher command levels were of little concern to the western-most German troops in the pocket, who continued their withdrawal during the night of 17 August. In the face of light Allied pressure from the west, the bulk of the units crossed the Orne River that night in good order despite road congestion, Allied artillery fire, and diminishing supplies. Gasoline shortages prompted the destruction and abandonment of some tanks and self-propelled guns. Few supplies were reaching the troops by road transport, but an air delivery on the evening of 17 August by 45 Heinkels (bombers modified to cargo carriers) brought some relief.<sup>5</sup> Behind the Orne River, the forces prepared to move on the following night to the high



FIELD MARSHAL MODEL

ground immediately east of the Falaise–Argentan highway.

The retreat across the Orne was a creditable achievement. Many divisions were by then only weak groups unable to hold a connected front. The 85th Division, for example, had reported as its strength on 15 August a battalion and a half of infantry and two guns. The LXXIV Corps had lost contact with the adjacent I SS Panzer Corps on its right flank. Yet special bridge commanders had regulated traffic strictly. Troops moved well in widely dispersed formations. Despite steep river banks, heavy Allied artillery fire, and daylight surveillance by "countless numbers" of

<sup>4</sup> *OB WEST KTB*, 17 Aug; *OB WEST, a Study in Command*, pp. 152–53; Ltr, Blumentritt to Jodl, 19 Aug, extracted in *OKW/222; AGp B KTB*, entry 1815, 17 Aug; Telecon, Speidel and Blumentritt, 2135, 17 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>5</sup> See Telecons, 0020 and 1050, 18 Aug, *AGp B KTB*.