

of artillery or mortar fire was falling by noon; small arms fire had ceased. Having fulfilled its COBRA assignment, the 9th Division passed into reserve for rest and reconstitution. The 4th Division mopped up isolated enemy remnants and prepared to move south in a new operation. The 30th Division, advancing south along the west bank of the Vire River, passed from control of the VII Corps.

For the infantry units that had run interference, Operation COBRA had ended. General Hobbs perhaps typified infantry sentiment when he stated, "We may be the spearhead that broke the camel's back."<sup>18</sup> There was no doubt that the camel's back was broken and that the infantry had helped break it. But the armored forces of Operation COBRA also played their part.

#### *Commitment of Armor*

For the Americans, the critical day of the COBRA operation was 26 July, when General Collins had gambled. He committed some of his forces assembled for the exploitation before the situation was unquestionably ripe for an exploitation maneuver. Specifically, the infantry had not captured the towns of Marigny and St. Gilles, road centers considered prerequisite to an uninhibited exploitation by mobile armored reserves.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that COBRA on 26 July was to become a three-corps offensive actually made it impossible for General Collins to wait for the infantry to seize Ma-

rigny and St. Gilles. The success of the larger effort depended basically on a VII Corps breakthrough. Emphasizing this fact, General Bradley assigned to VII Corps all the air support available on 26 July, thus obliging Collins to step up the attack. The only way to do this was to commit the armor.

The basic gamble involved was the possibility that armored columns would congest the VII Corps battlefield. "The only doubtful part of it [the original COBRA plan] to my mind," General Collins had said two weeks earlier, "is we shouldn't count too much on fast movement of armored divisions through this country; if we make a break-through it is OK but until them . . . [the armored divisions] can't move any faster than the infantry."<sup>20</sup> To minimize congestion, General Collins called upon only part of his reserve, two armored columns instead of the three that were ready.

The commitment of the mobile units on 26 July was not so much the start of the exploitation as an effort to deepen the penetration. Instead of assigning exploitation objectives, Collins told one of the armored columns to take Marigny, the other St. Gilles. Two hundred fighter-bombers were to attack each town in advance of the thrusts.<sup>21</sup> Only after these original infantry objectives were secured was the true exploitation phase of COBRA to begin.

Having expected the COBRA air bombardment to obliterate the German defenses and the infantry to clear the routes of advance, the commanders of the mobile forces had planned to move

<sup>18</sup> Telecon, Hobbs and Birks, 2300, 27 Jul, 30th Div Jnl and File.

<sup>19</sup> See Ruppenthal Notes, ML-2185.

<sup>20</sup> FUSA Conf Notes, 12 Jul, FUSA G-3 Misc File.

<sup>21</sup> 1st Div G-3 Jnl and File, entries 0500 and 0550, 26 Jul.

at least as far as Marigny and St. Gilles with reconnaissance squadrons ahead of their main spearheads. Now a semiadministrative road march of this type was out of the question. The commanders replaced their reconnaissance units with assault troops and retained their artillery under centralized control rather than parcelling it out to subordinate combat teams.<sup>22</sup>

Clearing the road to Marigny became the responsibility of Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner, who commanded the 1st Infantry Division and the attached Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division. Alerted on the afternoon of 25 July to pass through the 9th Division the next day and capture Marigny, General Huebner ordered CCB (Col. Truman E. Boudinot) and the reinforced 18th Infantry (Col. George Smith, Jr.) to attack abreast astride the road. Not quite certain whether the 1st Division, which had motorized its infantry troops, was embarking on exploitation, a VII Corps staff officer in a routine telephone call to transmit the bomb safety line remarked somewhat facetiously that his message was unnecessary if "you are going someplace and are going fast."<sup>23</sup> General Huebner, who commanded one of the two divisions General Eisenhower had characterized as "tops" in the theater, was planning to go somewhere fast all right.<sup>24</sup> He hoped to take Marigny quickly and proceed at once to exploit westward from Marigny to Coutances.

<sup>22</sup> 1st Div FO's 38 and 39, 19 and 25 Jul; G-3 Jnl, entry 1700, 25 Jul; Arty S-3 Per Rpt 38, 26 Jul; [Pillsbury], 2d Armd Div in Opn COBRA, p. 18; 3d Armd Div Arty Annex to 3d Armd Div FO 5, 19 Jul.

<sup>23</sup> 1st Div G-3 Jnl, entry 2155, 25 Jul.

<sup>24</sup> Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 5 Jul, Pogue Files.

The 1st Division made its approach march to the vicinity of the Périers-St. Lô highway during the night of 25 July without incident. Shortly after daybreak, 26 July, the leading units bypassed an enemy pocket of 150 men still north of the COBRA line of departure. Leaving the reduction of this small force to the reserve battalion of the 18th Infantry, the advance troops drove toward Marigny.<sup>25</sup>

With the combat command on the right (west) of the road and the infantry regiment on the left, the 1st Division troops moved cautiously against small arms fire. Bomb craters in the roads and defended hedgerows bounding the fields were the principal deterrents to a rapid advance. Small roadblocks also slowed the attack. Artillery and tank fire eliminated most of the opposition, but only after the infantry components had received heavy casualties, particularly among key personnel.

Near Marigny, the troops encountered the increasing resistance of the 353d Division and the two companies of the 2d SS Panzer Division. Several Mark IV tanks and a few 75-mm. antitank guns north of the town halted progress early in the afternoon. Under cover of an extended tank fire fight, CCB attempted an envelopment to the right but achieved no success. A tactical air strike late in the afternoon enabled armored elements to reach the northern edge of the town; the enveloping forces buttoned up for the night about a mile west of Marigny.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 1st Div AAR, Jul, G-3 Jnl, 25 and 26 Jul, Situation Overlay, 2400, 25 Jul, and Msgs, 0725 and 1010, 26 Jul; 1st Div Arty S-3 Per Rpt 39, 26 Jul; 9th Div G-3 Jnl, entries 0130 and 0210, 26 Jul.

<sup>26</sup> 3d Armd Div CCB AAR, Jul, Action 25 Jul-31 Jul.

The presence of American tanks in the northern outskirts of Marigny and the abortive envelopment led the 18th Infantry to the erroneous belief that the combat command had taken the town. Acting on this mistaken impression, the regiment sent a battalion to bypass the town on the east during the evening and take high ground south of Marigny. The battalion took some high ground shortly before midnight and reported completion of its mission. Unfortunately, the battalion had become lost in the darkness; not only was it on the wrong objective, its actual location was a mystery.

The belief that Marigny had been captured was one of the factors leading to General Collins' order to continue the attacks during the night of 26 July. Specifically, Collins instructed General Huebner to commence his exploitation toward Coutances. To provide additional elbow room for the 1st Division, General Collins redrew the boundary between the 1st and 9th Divisions.<sup>27</sup>

General Huebner for his part dared not carry out the order. He was not sure exactly where all his front-line units were, for reports of their locations and dispositions had confused his headquarters throughout the day; he was not certain that his troops had really secured Marigny; he was concerned by continuing resistance near Marigny; and, finally, he feared that large-scale movement during darkness would promote congestion and confusion.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> VII Corps Sitrep 101, 27 Jul, and Opns Memos 48 and 49, 25 and 27 Jul (the latter confirming oral orders 26 Jul); 9th Div G-3 Jnl, entry 1900, 26 Jul.

<sup>28</sup> 1st Div Arty S-3 Per Rpt 39, 26 Jul; VII Corps Tactical Study of the Terrain, 17 Jul.

Still without Marigny after two days, the VII Corps had yet to launch its main exploiting effort westward to Coutances. As discouraging as this seemed to be, the success achieved on the other flank of the corps was quite the opposite.

On the left (east) flank, Maj. Gen. Edward H. Brooks, commanding the 2d Armored Division, had what was essentially a protective mission: guarding the COBRA flank on the south and southeast. Yet if General Brooks realized that his mission was defensive in nature, he gave no indication of it. So far as he was concerned, he was going to move. With the 22d Infantry (Col. Charles T. Lanharn) attached, he was to attack in a column of combat commands, which eventually were to split and make independent thrusts. Brig. Gen. Maurice Rose's Combat Command A, with the 22d Infantry attached, was to be the leading unit.<sup>29</sup> Rose's troops were to pass through the 30th Division zone and secure St. Gilles.

Effecting the passage of lines without difficulty, CCA drove south early on 26 July in a single column.<sup>30</sup> Almost immediately after the troops crossed the Périers-St. Lô highway, an enemy anti-tank gun destroyed one Sherman, but this was a blow not soon repeated. Brooks told Rose to get moving, and Rose complied. As the column began to roll, only scattered artillery and anti-tank fire and an occasional defended hedgerow or ditch provided any genuine

<sup>29</sup> Other elements of CCA were: 66th Armored Regiment, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion, 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and engineer, antiaircraft, medical, and maintenance detachments.

<sup>30</sup> 2d Div AAR, Jul; see [Pillsbury], 2d Armd Div in Opn COBRA, p. 18.

resistance. When combined with the problem of bomb craters dotting the countryside, this was nevertheless sufficient to preclude a rapid advance. In the early afternoon a defended road-block several hundred yards north of St. Gilles held up progress for a short time, but tank fire and an air strike that destroyed four Mark IV tanks and a self-propelled gun soon eliminated the opposition.

In midafternoon CCA rolled through St. Gilles. By this act, the combat command launched the exploitation phase of COBRA. There was no longer any doubt that the German line had definitely been penetrated. The VII Corps had achieved its breakthrough.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Limited Exploitation*

South of St. Gilles, CCA of the 2d Armored Division, with the 22d Infantry still attached, headed for its initial objective in the exploitation: the high ground five miles beyond St. Gilles, ground commanding an extensive network of roads leading into the COBRA zone from the east and south. There, at St. Samson-de-Bonfossé, le Mesnil-Herman, and Hill 183, the armor would find good defensive positions from which to halt a possible German counterattack from across the Vire River. To reach the area, CCA had to pass through Canisy, not quite two miles south of St. Gilles.

Proceeding steadily against mortar, artillery, and antitank fire interdicting the Canisy road, CCA had more difficulty with bomb craters, mine fields, and hedgerows than with the occasional



TROOPS ROLLING THROUGH CANISY

enemy resistance. In late afternoon General Rose reported opposition in his zone negligible and estimated that the rear of his column would soon clear St. Gilles.<sup>32</sup> Rose's optimism contributed materially to General Collins' decision to continue the corps attack during the night.

Part of the reason why the opposition was negligible lay in the clearing operations of the 30th Division. Another part lay in the fact that the St. Gilles-Canisy road was the boundary separating the LXXXIV and II Parachute Corps sectors. *Panzer Lehr* was specifically responsible for the highway. The virtual destruction of *Panzer Lehr* left the road open. The 352d Division, manning the sector between the road and the river,

<sup>31</sup> FUSA G-2 Per Rpt 47, 27 Jul.

<sup>32</sup> 2d Armd Div Msgs, 1730 and 1830, 26 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

was thus continually outflanked as Rose's combat command drove down an excellent route of advance, threatened solely by occasional flanking fire.

Only as CCA neared the first buildings in Canisy was there any real resistance. At a railroad embankment north of Canisy where a bombed railway overpass had tumbled across the highway, a few Germans tried to make a stand; the combat command outflanked the position from the east and raked the defenders with enfilading fire.<sup>33</sup> Coincidentally, dive bombers struck Canisy and set half the town ablaze. The armor rolled through the burning town that evening.

Just beyond Canisy, General Rose split his command into two columns. One moved southeastward toward St. Samson-de-Bonfossé, the other southward toward le Mesnil-Herman. Although division headquarters assumed that the combat command had halted for the night, Rose drove his men forward with single-minded purpose and determination in compliance with General Collins' and General Brooks' orders.<sup>34</sup> An hour before midnight one column entered St. Samson-de-Bonfossé without a fight. Three hours later the other seized the road intersection just north of le Mesnil-Herman. Only then, with part of the initial objective in hand, did General Rose sanction a halt.

The next morning, 27 July, as batteries of the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion leapfrogged forward to give continuous fire support, the combat command engaged enemy tanks and antitank guns before taking and securing

le Mensil-Herman. Hill 183 fell during the afternoon. With that, CCA completed its initial mission.<sup>35</sup>

In two days Combat Command A had lost less than 200 men, 3 medium tanks, and 2 small trucks. Not only the weakness of the opposition but the dispatch with which General Rose had secured his objective had prevented higher casualties. Even so, Rose was not satisfied with his accomplishment; he complained that the poor condition of the roads, the absence of road bypasses, and the hedgerow terrain had slowed his movement.<sup>36</sup>

As General Rose prepared to reconnoiter in force toward Villebaudon and Tessy-sur-Vire on the morning of 28 July, word came that CCA's role in COBRA was over. The combat command and the attached infantry regiment were soon to pass from the control of the VII Corps.

While General Rose's attack had moved smoothly against light opposition, General Huebner had met unexpected difficulty at Marigny on 26 July. The 1st Division, with Combat Command B of the 3d Armored Division attached, had been unable to start the main effort of the exploitation—its thrust westward from Marigny to Coutances to slash across the rear of the German troops facing north against the VIII Corps. Since the VIII Corps had begun to exert pressure from the north on 26 July, it became vital for the 1st Division to get to Coutances at once in or-

<sup>33</sup> 2d Armd Div Msg, 1130, 27 Jul, 30th Div Jnl and File. Lt. Col. Lindsay C. Herkness, Jr., was awarded the DSC for his heroic leadership of armored troops; Capt. Mario T. DeFelice, a medical officer, was awarded the DSC for heroism.

<sup>34</sup> 2d Armd Div Msg, 0730, 27 Jul, 30th Div Jnl and File.

<sup>35</sup> 2d Armd Div Msgs, 1930 and 2030, 26 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>36</sup> 2d Armd Div G-3 Per Rpt 4, 27 Jul.

der to execute the squeeze play that was part of the basic COBRA idea.

Even though General Huebner did not possess a secure pivot point at Marigny, he felt impelled to begin his exploitation on the morning of 27 July. He ordered Colonel Boudinot's CCB to initiate the westward thrust toward Coutances. In the meantime, Colonel Smith's 18th Infantry was to attack Marigny and high ground south of the town in order to secure the road network required for sustaining the exploitation.

Getting CCB on the way to Coutances conformed with the original 1st Division plan, a plan devised to employ as the axis of advance the east-west Coutances-St. Lô highway, which passes through rolling *bocage* country. West of Marigny the highway runs along the southern slope of a ridge line formed by a complex of three hills—the highest rising 580 feet—a mile or so north of the highway. This prominent terrain feature dominating the approaches to Coutances from the north and east provided an excellent natural blocking position astride the routes of withdrawal of the German forces facing the VIII Corps, and together with Coutances was the 1st Division's objective.

Of the three hills forming the ridge line, the first, five miles west of Marigny, is near Camprond. The second, two miles farther to the west, is near Camberton. The third is near Monthuchon. To General Huebner the early capture of these hills was of double importance, for they dominated also his own route of approach to Coutances.

General Huebner had selected his attached armored command to spearhead the attack both because a rapid advance along the highway was essential for suc-

cess of the COBRA scheme of maneuver and because the highway between Marigny and Coutances was excellent. CCB was to seize the first objective, Camprond, then the third objective, Monthuchon. Motorized infantry regimental combat teams of organic 1st Division troops were to follow in column. The 18th Infantry was to relieve CCB first at Camprond, then at Monthuchon. In turn, the reinforced 16th Infantry (Col. Frederick W. Gibb) was to relieve the 18th at Camprond. The reinforced 26th Infantry (Col. John F. R. Seitz) was to follow secondary roads on the left flank of the other units and seize the second objective, Camberton. In the end, all three infantry regiments would be lined up on the three objectives to the rear of the German line.

After being relieved at Monthuchon, CCB had a further mission, which was determined by the location of Monthuchon on the north-south Périers-Coutances highway, one of the main escape routes for Germans withdrawing before VIII Corps. The combat command was to be prepared to do one of two things: if the VIII Corps had not pushed back the Germans, CCB was to attack northward toward Périers; if the Germans were trying to escape to the south, CCB was to proceed southwestward from Monthuchon to high ground a mile or so north of Coutances in order to block the three main highways leading into Coutances from the north.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 1st Div FO 38, 19 Jul; Annex 1 to 3d Armd Div FO 4, 19 Jul. There was some question on the final mission of the combat command. The 3d Armored Division CCB Field Order 5 of 20 July states that the combat command was to prepare to attack north toward Périers only after blocking the roads above Coutances.

Because of the unexpected resistance at Marigny, General Huebner changed his plan of maneuver on the morning of 27 July. Since continued German possession of Marigny denied the 1st Division an adequate road net, General Huebner withheld one regiment, the 26th, in order to reduce the hazard of traffic congestion. CCB was to secure Camprond, the first objective. Instead of following the armor, the 18th Infantry was to capture Marigny, then send a battalion to free the armor at Camprond. The 16th Infantry, instead of relieving the 18th at Camprond, was to make a wider swing to the west, echeloned to the left rear of CCB, and move all the way to the blocking positions on the highways just north of Coutances. Meanwhile, CCB was to attack and secure in turn all three hill objectives.<sup>38</sup>

The 18th Infantry cleared Marigny on the morning of 27 July, and that afternoon two battalions attacked to the south against strong opposition in an attempt to seize the high ground needed to secure the town.<sup>39</sup> The reserve battalion in midafternoon moved westward along the Coutances highway to relieve CCB at Camprond.

Early that morning CCB had lunged down the Coutances highway.<sup>40</sup> Spearheaded by the reconnaissance battalion and divided into three balanced teams or task forces (a company each of medium tanks and armored infantry), the combat command advanced with two teams abreast. Against disorganized opposition, the attack carried four miles

in four hours. Shortly after midday the task force on the right turned to the north and struck cross-country for the hill near Camprond, two miles away. By midafternoon the task force held the objective.

The advance along the highway had been virtually a road march except for casual encounters with German motorcyclists, ambulances, and staff cars. Progress on the flanks had been more difficult, for the presence of hedgerows enabled scattered enemy groups to form hasty defenses and resist with determination. The result was a gain on a narrow front scarcely wider than the width of the highway.

Moving to relieve the force at Camprond, the battalion of the 18th Infantry encountered virtually no opposition on the Coutances highway, but when it moved off the road toward the hill small enemy groups supported by random tanks began to cause trouble. With the help of fighter-bombers, the battalion gained the hill shortly before midnight.

Meanwhile, the 16th Infantry, which was to make a parallel advance on the left and move swiftly to Coutances, was unable to pass through Marigny until late afternoon of 27 July. Against scattered opposition and sporadic fire, the regiment advanced in a column of battalions immediately south of the Coutances highway. Shortly before midnight the leading battalion came abreast of CCB at a point directly south of Camprond.

Thus at midnight, 27 July, the 1st Division had advanced on a front not quite three miles wide to a point about five miles west of Marigny.<sup>41</sup> Though no

<sup>38</sup> 1st Div AAR, Jul.

<sup>39</sup> VII Corps Msg, 0930, 27 Jul, VII Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>40</sup> 3d Armd Div CCB Ops Overlay and FO, 26 Jul.

<sup>41</sup> 1st Div Situation Overlay, 2400, 27 Jul, 9th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

organized enemy opposition was apparent, small enemy groups supported by an occasional tank or antitank gun formed islands of resistance, floating and static, in the American sea of advance, endangering both supply and evacuation. When twenty-one supply trucks loaded with rations, gasoline, ammunition, and military police went forward from Marigny, a company of medium tanks accompanied them to give protection. The column reached Camprond without incident, but, returning after dark with two truckloads of prisoners, the column had to fight its way back to Marigny.<sup>42</sup> The attempt of a reconnaissance platoon to cross the Lozon River three miles west of Marigny stimulated a counterattack by about a hundred Germans supported by a medium tank and an antitank gun. The platoon had to call for infantry and armor reinforcements from the 9th and 1st Division before dispersing the enemy group.<sup>43</sup>

The result of the main COBRA effort produced disappointment. "Generally, we are not being able to push very fast," the VII Corps G-3 admitted.<sup>44</sup> General Huebner had hoped to rip into the rear of the German defense line. His troops were to have cut German telephone wires, disrupted communications, and in general produced confusion and disorganization.<sup>45</sup> But instead of raising havoc in a slashing exploitation, the 1st Division had not yet secured Marigny and was only half way to Coutances.

<sup>42</sup> 9d Armd Div CCB AAR, Jul.

<sup>43</sup> 4th Cav Recon Sq (Mechanized) Unit Rpt 1, 27 Jul, 1st Div G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>44</sup> VII Corps Msg, 0930, 27 Jul, VII Corps G-3 Jnl and File.

<sup>45</sup> 1st Div FO 38, 19 Jul.

The reason for the disappointing advance by the forces carrying the main COBRA effort was to be found in the German dispositions. The *LXXXIV Corps* left had made a withdrawal along the Cotentin west coast during the night of 26 July with the intention of establishing a new main line of resistance. Yet on 27 July the contemplated positions of this line were becoming untenable even before they were established because of the VII Corps threat developing west of Marigny toward the German right (east) flank. When Hausser and Choltitz suddenly became aware that American armored columns were moving through the Marigny-St. Gilles gap, they realized that they would have to move fast to avoid encirclement from the east. There was no alternative to continuing the withdrawal along the Cotentin west coast. To insure escape from encirclement, they erected a north-south defensive line facing eastward. Units manning the line included elements of the depleted *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*, reluctantly withdrawing paratroopers, the *353d Division*, and small elements of the *2d SS Panzer Division*.

During the early afternoon of 27 July Choltitz learned that American troops—CCB of the 3d Armored Division, attached to the 1st Division—seemed to have clear sailing toward Coutances. American scouting parties on minor roads had made contact with artillery units of the *353d Division* and the *LXXXIV Corps*, and German artillerymen were fighting as infantry. Discovering also that American troops had reached Guesnay, Choltitz ordered the engineer battalion of the *17th SS Panzer*

*Grenadier Division* to "proceed immediately via Montcuit and Cambernon to the railroad junction and seal off the front to the east if you are not [now] engaged in battle.<sup>46</sup>

Harassed continuously by fighter-bombers, the engineer battalion marched eight miles and took positions along the railroad that night. Just to the north, the battalion found a company of the *2d SS Panzer Division* defending Cambernon with ten Panther tanks. This north-south defensive line facing eastward, though far from strong, was efficacious in slowing the 1st Division attack toward Coutances on 27 July. Farther south, hastily organized positions between Carantilly and Quibou held up another American armored column, this one driving toward Montpinchon.

Hausser, meanwhile, had requested permission to withdraw the *LXXXIV Corps* to the Geffosse-St. Sauveur-Lendelin line. Soon afterward he wanted authorization to withdraw even farther, to Coutances. In both cases, he planned to make the withdrawal under the protection of the *2d SS Panzer Division*, which was moving into the Cambernon sector.<sup>47</sup> However, all plans were held in abeyance because Kluge, somewhat inexplicably to those in the Cotentin who awaited his advice, was inspecting the *Panzer Group West* front near Caen. Deciding they could wait no longer, Hausser and Choltitz agreed to withdraw to Coutances and hold it as the anchor point of a new line—an

arc through Cambernon, Savigny, and Cerisy-la-Salle. Unfortunately for their plan, they were unaware that *Panzer Lehr* for all practical purposes no longer existed, and they were counting on *Panzer Lehr* to hold the Soule River line at Pont-Brocard.

When Kluge returned from the Caen sector late on the afternoon of 27 July, he received a detailed report of a badly deteriorating situation. The salient points were that the *353d Division* was presumed cut off and lost; the *352d Division* on the west bank of the Vire was badly battered and holding a shaky security line facing northwestward into a yawning gap; and remnants of *Panzer Lehr* and the *275th Division*, reinforced by what was hoped was a tank battalion of the *2d SS Panzer Division*, were supposedly holding a line at Quibou and westward. The Americans were running wild; details were not clear, but some troops were known to have reached the village of Dangy, near the vicinity of the *Panzer Lehr* and the *275th Division* command posts.

In this situation, Hausser recommended that Kluge permit him to restore order by straightening the *Seventh Army* front. Hausser proposed to have the *II Parachute Corps* withdraw the *3d Parachute Division* (east of the Vire) "platoon by platoon" and have the *LXXXIV Corps* pull back to the banks of the Soule and Siene Rivers.<sup>48</sup> Actually, this maneuver relied on using the nonexistent *Panzer Lehr* to hold a six-mile gap between Pont-Brocard and the shaky *352d Division* on the west bank of the Vire. Furthermore, it

<sup>46</sup> *17th SS Pz Gren Div* Msg, 1415, 27 Jul, *17th SS Engr Bn KTB*; see also Telecon, Helmdach and Speidel, 1310, 27 Jul, *AGp B KTB*, and Choltitz, *Soldat Unter Soldaten*, pp. 205-06.

<sup>47</sup> Telecons, Pemsel and Speidel, 1400, 27 Jul, and Hausser and Speidel, 1530, 27 Jul, *AGp B KTB*.

<sup>48</sup> Telecon, Kluge and Pemsel, 1700, 27 Jul, *AGp B KTB*.

counted on a tank battalion of the *2d SS Panzer Division* at Quibou that in reality had but fourteen tanks.

Still primarily concerned with the Caen sector held by *Panzer Group West*, Kluge refused to countenance the withdrawal by the *II Parachute Corps*, which might expose the *Panzer Group West* flank. He instead ordered the *II Parachute Corps* to defend in place in the St. Lô-Caumont sector while the *LXXXIV Corps* anchored its forces on Coutances and executed a fighting withdrawal to the Soulles-Sienne river line. Meanwhile, he was assembling an experienced and somewhat rested armored division in the Caumont area for action in the Cotentin. Aided by whatever could be found of *Panzer Lehr*, the *275th Division*, and the *2d SS Panzer Division*, the experienced armored division was to launch a counterattack to close the gap between the *LXXXIV* and *II Parachute Corps* of the *Seventh Army*.

In addition to the *9th Panzer Division*, which Kluge had requested on the previous day, he asked OKW to send a total of four infantry divisions to Normandy from the *Fifteenth* and *Nineteenth Armies*. Still concerned with the Allied threat to invade southern France, yet realizing that Kluge's situation was serious, Hitler approved release of the *9th Panzer Division* for commitment in Normandy. On the following day, 28 July, he authorized the movement to Normandy of three infantry divisions, the *84th*, the *331st*, and the *708th*.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Cotentin those *LXXXIV Corps* units still north of the St. Lô-Coutances highway infiltrated

south through the *VII Corps* column or moved around the western end of the American point during the night of 27 July. Covered by a reinforced regiment of the *2d SS Panzer Division*, which held a defensive arc from Cambernon to Savigny, the units on the Cotentin west coast continued to move south on 28 July. The units were the depleted *243d Division*, the kampfgruppe of the *265th Division*, and elements of the *77th Division* and of the *5th Parachute Division*, all apparently under the operational control of the *91st Division*. The *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* moved in broad daylight, though harassed from the air, to Cerisy-la-Salle in time to meet an American armored column there. At the same time the *6th Parachute Regiment*, together with *2d SS Panzer Division* tanks and the engineer battalion of the *17th SS*, covered the rear of the withdrawal and protected Coutances from positions near Ouville.

These moves reflected and contributed to the changing situation. Already, on the evening of 27 July, General Bradley had altered plans by assigning General Huebner's last two objectives—Monthuchon and the high ground north of Coutances—to the *VIII Corps*.<sup>50</sup> But since Huebner saw no certainty that the *VIII Corps* could reach these objectives ahead of the *1st Division*, he proceeded on the tentative assumption that they might still be valid for him. Huebner thus ordered a continuation of his attack on 28 July. CCB was to take Cambernon, the 16th Infantry to capture Monthuchon, the 18th Infantry to remain in the Marigny area, and the 26th

<sup>49</sup> AGp B and OB WEST KTB's, 27-28 Jul; OB WEST KTB, Anlage 878.

<sup>50</sup> FUSA FO 2, 28 Jul; see below, Ch. XIV.