

Following immediately, 1,800 heavy bombers, in an hour-long strike, were to blast the main target area, a rectangular "carpet" adjacent to and south of the narrow strip. Upon conclusion of the heavy bomber attack—the beginning of the ground attack—350 fighter-bombers were to strafe and bomb the narrow strip again for twenty minutes. Ten minutes after the completion of this strike, 396 medium bombers were to attack the southern half of the rectangle for forty-five minutes. Throughout the duration of the bombardment, 500 fighters were to fly bomber cover.⁷⁶

For the ground troops, the narrow strip was the threshold, the target area the entrance to the Marigny-St. Gilles gap. To blast open a passageway on the ground, approximately 2,500 planes in a bombardment lasting two hours and twenty-five minutes were to strike a target area of six square miles with almost 5,000 tons of high explosive, jellied gasoline, and white phosphorus.

This kind of air power, many times the equivalent of available artillery, required careful co-ordination to avoid striking U.S. troops, particularly since the employment of heavy bombers intensified the usual problems and dangers of close air support. The size of the individual plane bomb load gave each bomber a considerable casualty-producing potentiality, but since heavy bombers attacked in units, with a lead

bombardier controlling the bomb release of a dozen or so planes, an error in computation or a failure to identify a landmark properly could easily result in disaster. The absence of direct radio communication between the troops on the ground and the heavy bombers in flight made reliance on visual signals necessary. To define the northern limit of the heavy bomber target area during the air attack, artillery was to place red smoke every two minutes on the narrow fighter-bomber strip.⁷⁷ This precaution was far from foolproof, for strategic aircraft bombed from high altitudes, and ground haze, mist, dust, or a sudden change of wind direction might render visual signals worthless. Ground troops on the front were to withdraw one hour before the air attack, leaving a protective shell of light forces in position until twenty minutes before the air bombardment, when they too were to withdraw. After the withdrawal, the ground troops were to mark their locations with fluorescent panels. All units participating in COBRA were to have repainted the Allied white-star insignia on their vehicles and tanks.⁷⁸

In the same way that infantry failure to follow an artillery preparation closely tends to cancel the effect of a well-delivered concentration, the inability of the COBRA ground attack to take quick advantage of the bombardment would waste the blast effect of the bombs on the enemy. The ground troops were to cross the three quarters of a mile that

⁷⁶ AEA Opn COBRA, 20 Jul, AEA/Ts.13165/Air, USAF Hist Sec Files, set the planning in motion; IX TAC Ops Order 88 and 89, 19 and 20 Jul, and Annex 4 to VII Corps FO 6, 20 Jul, are the basic planning documents. See also Leigh-Mallory, "Despatch," Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette* of December 31, 1946, p. 65; Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, p. 341; *AAF III*, pp. 231-32.

⁷⁷ VII Corps Ops Memo 45, 22 Jul; Annex 3 to 30th Div FO 13, Air Support Plan, 22 Jul.

⁷⁸ Sketch showing prebombardment withdrawal, n.d., 9th Div G-3 Jnl and File; VII Corps Ops Memo 43, 20 Jul; Bradley, *Effect of Air Power*, p. 104.

separated them from the air target at the conclusion of the heavy bomber strike while fighter-bombers still were strafing and bombing the narrow strip immediately south to the Périers-St. Lô road. The arrival of the infantry at the line of departure and the conclusion of the fighter-bomber strike were to be simultaneous. Medium bombers were then to commence attacking the southern half of the carpet and to continue until the ground troops were across the road and the narrow strip. To insure coordination, the units on the ground were to move forward at the rate of one hundred feet a minute.⁷⁹ Artillery was to deliver normal preparatory fires, reinforced by tank destroyer concentrations and antiaircraft artillery ground fire, on the area between the troops and the bombarding planes.

One hour after the ground attack jumped off, all the fighter-bombers of the IX Tactical Air Command and one group of RAF Typhoon planes were to be available to support the First Army for the rest of the day with assault area cover, offensive fighter operations, armed reconnaissance, and air support request missions. Six hours after the ground attack, medium bombers, after having returned to England for refueling and reloading, were to become available for

additional missions as necessary. Dive bombers were to be ready for missions on one hour's notice. If the infantry divisions made rapid progress and the exploiting forces were employed at once, fighter-bombers were to furnish column cover by flying protection and reconnaissance for the armored spearheads.⁸⁰

This was the plan on which the Allies counted so much, and on 23 July Allied weather experts expressed a cautious hope that COBRA might soon be launched. Predicting that a slight overcast might break in the late morning of 24 July and that morning haze and light fog would disappear later that day, the forecasters reported that the weather on 24 and 25 July would be favorable for ground operations and moderately favorable for air activity.⁸¹ After a week of waiting, the Allies found the prospect tempting. With Caen and St. Lô in Allied hands, the arrival of fresh infantry and armored divisions on the Continent, mounting stocks of supplies and equipment increasingly available, and the Germans suffering from attrition, a lack of supplies, and an absence of air support, the situation appeared favorable for the breakthrough operation. Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory gave the green light, and the dormant body of COBRA prepared to strike.

⁷⁹ Misc Notes, n.d., 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; Overlay, Amendment 1 to Incl 1, Annex 3 to 30th Div FO 13, 22 Jul; VII Corps Ops Memo 43, 20 Jul.

⁸⁰ IX TAC Opns Order 90, 20 Jul, IX TAC Opns COBRA, USAF Hist Sec Files.

⁸¹ 21 Weather Squadron Msg, 23 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

CHAPTER XII

COBRA

The Opposition

While awaiting the signal for COBRA to begin, intelligence officers pondered some troublesome questions.¹ Did the enemy defenses on the Lessay-St. Lô road represent the actual main battle position? Were there enough mobile German reserves assembled locally to counter the attack successfully? What major reserves were available to the Germans? Where were they? Where were they likely to be committed? Was the Luftwaffe capable of intervention? Would the Germans employ the V-1, V-2, or some other secret weapon against COBRA?

Barring the appearance of miracle weapons and a miraculous resuscitation of the German Air Force, the enemy was thought capable of only defensive action. Neither the *LXXXIV Corps* nor the *II Parachute Corps* seemed to have local reserves capable of intervening with effect. Nor did either *Seventh Army* or *Panzer Group West* appear to have excess troops that might be committed against COBRA. Even if the Germans somehow assembled a reserve for a coun-

terattack from the base of the Cotentin, they would need more time to concentrate sufficient forces than the Americans thought they themselves needed to achieve the success they expected of COBRA. Though the Germans might attempt a rigid defense of the Périers-St. Lô line, deficiencies in manpower and supplies made an effective defense doubtful. The most likely course of enemy action, then, seemed to be a gradual withdrawal accompanied by strong delaying action in terrain favorable to defense, probably along three successive natural defensive lines: between Coutances and Canisy, in the Gavray area, and at the base of the Cotentin near Avranches.

The Americans estimated that the enemy troops facing VII and VIII Corps numbered no more than 17,000 men with less than 100 tanks in support—a slight force to resist the power of more than five times that strength assembled for COBRA. Since captured letters and documents and prisoner-of-war interrogations indicated that the German soldier was weary of war and had no real hope of victory, the fierce resistance met in the hedgerows seemed inexplicable. Perhaps the Germans would suddenly give way during COBRA. Similarly, on the strategic level, it seemed impossible that Germany could hold out much longer. A shortage of oil had become

¹ Material on intelligence is from: FUSA Intel Annex to Opn Plan COBRA, 16 Jul; FUSA G-2 Est 9 and 10, 10 and 18 Jul; Annex 2 to VII Corps FO 6, 17 Jul; VII Corps G-2 Est, 17 Jul; VIII Corps G-2 Est 4, 15 Jul; JIC (44) 301 (O) (Final), Weaknesses in Germany's Capacity to Resist, 20 Jul 44, JIC Papers, 1944, Pogue Files; TUSA G-2 Per Rpt 35, 16 Jul.

the major factor limiting strategic and operational efficiency both in the air and on the ground. Deficiencies in heavy armament had dropped the tank strength of panzer divisions to an average of about 70 percent of tables of equipment. A scarcity of drivers, as well as of oil, had intensified a shortage of motor transport that was further increased by wastage far exceeding vehicle replacements and captured matériel. All types of ammunition had deteriorated in quality and quantity. The same could be said for manpower. Propaganda inside Germany seemed to be losing its force and influence. Yet there was no evidence to suggest that anything but invasion of Germany proper would produce a collapse of the home front. Both at home and on the battlefield, the Germans refused to accept the defeat that from the Allied point of view seemed inevitable and only a matter of time.

The significant factors on the battlefield appeared to be the continued lag in infantry build-up and the piecemeal employment of reserves as they reached the battle area. As a result, instead of massing reserves for a co-ordinated counteroffensive, the Germans had dissipated them. The Germans had been compelled to assume a purely defensive attitude, and were forced to fight a constant delaying action from one hastily prepared line or position to another while mounting local counterattacks in company or battalion strength. Without a strategic reserve, the Germans were stripping their Breton defenses and denuding their French Mediterranean coastal positions to meet Allied pressure in Normandy. Only the continued fear of another Allied amphibious assault in

the Pas-de-Calais kept strong forces immobile there. It was reasonable to suppose that the Germans would probably maintain an aggressive defensive attitude along the entire battle front in Normandy and try to amass reserves for a major counterattack sometime in the future, but not in time to affect COBRA.

Allied estimates were quite correct, even though Kluge, commander in chief in the west who had also formally taken command of *Army Group B*, had had some success in building up the front in Normandy. Kluge had managed to secure four infantry divisions from southern France and the Pas-de-Calais (more were promised him), and he was using them to replace armored divisions on the *Panzer Group West* front. His motive was twofold: to keep the panzer divisions from being "ground to pieces," because if that happened "there won't be anything left"; and to create a mobile reserve. Eberbach, the *Panzer Group West* commander, helped Kluge by taking drastic steps to assemble transport and thus speed the arrival of the infantry divisions. Eberbach also feared that if the infantry divisions arriving as replacements came too slowly, little of the panzer divisions would be left to be relieved. Between 10 and 22 July, the four newly arrived infantry divisions replaced five panzer divisions.² Operation GOODWOOD virtually nullified this

² The 277th Division replaced the 9th SS Panzer Division on 10 July; the 272d relieved the 1st and the 12th SS Panzer Divisions during the night of 13 July; the 271st replaced the 10th SS Panzer Division on 17 July; and the 326th relieved the 2d Panzer Division on 22 July. Telecon, Kluge and Jodl, 1828, 13 Jul. OB WEST KTB, Anlage 615; "Unterrichtung ueber die Arbeitsweise des Stages Ob. West . . .," 20 Jul, OB WEST KTB, Anlage 773; Hodgson, R-54.

achievement by forcing the recommitment of armor.

The reason for Kluge's primary concern with the *Panzer Group West* portion of the front—that part facing the British—was the terrain around Caen. Montgomery's pressure, climaxed by the Goodwood attack, indicated that both Montgomery and Kluge were acting according to the dictates of the terrain. The little offensive planning on higher German echelons during July turned about the idea of launching an attack in the Caen region some time in August.³ As a result of preoccupation with both the vulnerability of the *Panzer Group West* sector and its excellence for offensive operations, the Germans virtually overlooked the *Seventh Army* front. (*Map IV*)

Dissatisfied with the strength of the Cotentin defenses, Kluge advised Hausser, the *Seventh Army* commander, that his mission was to avoid being pushed back into the interior of France, where the Allies could swing wide and outflank the German positions near Caen. Specifically, Hausser was to remove the two armored divisions on his front—the *2d SS Panzer Division* and *Panzer Lehr*—and concentrate them under army control to be used flexibly against threatened penetrations. Hausser's only immediate move in this direction was to detach two tank companies from the *2d SS Panzer Division* and place them in the army reserve. Before complying further, he awaited the arrival of the *363d Infantry Division* (coming from the *Fifteenth Army*), which was not to reach the *Seventh Army* sector until August. Haus-

ser might have taken *Panzer Lehr* out of the line by substituting for it the *275th Infantry Division*, which he retained under army control immediately behind *Panzer Lehr*. He might have replaced the entire *2d SS Panzer Division* with the *353d Infantry Division*, which Choltitz, the *LXXXIV Corps* commander, withdrew to form a reserve of his own. But Hausser hesitated to pull armor out of the front line because he felt that "the defensive capabilities of an infantry division are less" than those of an armored division. Apparently believing that the type of terrain furnished adequate reason for maintaining the static defense already erected, Hausser did little more than clamor for battlefield replacements, additional artillery and supplies, and the sight of air cover.⁴

Yet Hausser was concerned. The battle of the hedgerows had worn down his forces at an alarming rate. The little that remained of the static units that had fought since the invasion lacked transport, adequate equipment, and even weapons.⁵ The more recently arrived units in the Cotentin were also suffering the ravages of attrition. Had the Americans continued their pressure, a decisive result would probably have occurred within a month. But Hausser and other German commanders expected that the Americans would be too impatient to await this kind of decision, and they looked for signs of a big new U.S. offensive. Hausser watched where it seemed more likely to begin—east of the Vire—and in doing so he failed to per-

³ Ltr, Rommel to Kluge, 15 Jul, *Seventh Army KTB, Anlagen, Chefsachen*; see Hodgson, R-57.

⁴ *Seventh Army KTB*, 20 Jul; Zimmerman Telecon, 1320, 15 Jul, and Telecon, Helmdach and Tempelhoff, 2240, 25 Jul, *AGp B KTB*; Hodgson, R-57.

⁵ See MS # B-731 (Fahrmbacher).

ceive the build-up west of the Vire. He could not conceive of a major attack in strength taking place between St. Lô and Coutances because the terrain there was not conducive to a massive effort. Although Choltitz on 23 July reported a concentration of strong armored forces near the Cotentin west coast, the *Seventh Army* headquarters denied categorically that any indications of an immediately impending attack existed.⁶ Part of the reason for the lack of perception at higher headquarters was an overawareness of the importance of the terrain, a feeling that the menacing strength of the British and Canadian units encouraged. It was this that made the German surprise even greater when COBRA came.

Facing the U.S. troops poised to execute COBRA and holding positions generally along the Lessay-St. Lô highway, the *LXXXIV Corps* controlled many units but relatively few troops. In the coastal sector, near Lessay, were the battered remnants of the *243d Division* and beside it the *91st*, with control over remaining elements of the *77th Division* and the exhausted kampfgruppe of the *265th Division* (the depleted *15th Parachute Regiment* of the *5th Parachute Division* had moved east of the Vire River to provide a reserve for the *3d Parachute Division* in the St. Lô sector). The still-strong *2d SS Panzer Division* (augmented by the separate (independent) *6th Parachute Regiment*) and the considerably weakened forces of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* defended in the Périers area. Immediately to the east was the *5th Parachute Division*, recently arrived from Brittany and controlling

only one regiment. *Panzer Lehr* (augmented by 450 combat troops of the badly damaged *Kampfgruppe Heinz* of the *275th Division* and by 500 partially trained combat troops of an inexperienced regiment of the *5th Parachute Division*, plus some elements of the *2d SS Panzer Division*), occupied the greater part of the ground between the Taute and the Vire, but its right boundary was two miles short of the Vire River. On the right (east) of the *LXXXIV Corps* boundary and adjacent to *Panzer Lehr*, 650 battle-fatigued combat troops of the *352d Division* plus some attached units, all under the control of the *II Parachute Corps*, occupied a two-mile front on the west bank of the Vire.

Each of these units held a portion of the front. In immediate reserve were infantry, reconnaissance, and engineer battalions in the process of rehabilitation. Forming the *LXXXIV Corps* reserve, the tired *353d Division* was assembled south of Périers and behind the *5th Parachute Division*. In *Seventh Army* reserve the *275th Division*, newly arrived from Brittany and controlling two regiments, was stationed behind *Panzer Lehr*. Two infantry companies and two tank companies of the *2d SS Panzer Division* were also under the *Seventh Army* control as a mobile task force in reserve.⁷

The troops directly opposing the U.S.

⁶ Maj. Kenneth W. Hechler, *The Enemy Build-up Prior to Operation COBRA*, MS, OCMH Files.

⁷ *Panzer Lehr Division Monthly Status Rpts for Jun and Jul 44*, OKH Generalinspektor der Panzertruppen, *Zustandsberichte, Heer*, Jun-Aug 44; AGp B KTB, 15.I-4.X.44; AGp B Ia Letztemeldungen, 8.VI.-10.VIII.44, and Ia Tagesmeldungen, 6.VI.-31.VIII.44; *Seventh Army KTB (Draft)* 6.VI-16.VIII.44; MS # A-902 (Bayerlein); MS # A-973 (Schmidt); MS # A-975 (Schmidt); MS # B-820 (Wilke); Hodgson, R-54; Hechler, *The Enemy Build-up Prior to Operation COBRA*.

VII Corps on the morning of 24 July totaled about 30,000 men, quite a few more than the Americans estimated. The actual number of combat effectives on or near the front between the Taute and the Vire was much less, perhaps only 5,000. Of these, approximately 3,200 combat effectives of *Panzer Lehr* and its attached units were directly in the path of COBRA.

Authorized almost 15,000 men, *Panzer Lehr* was seriously reduced in strength. Its losses had been almost entirely among its combat elements. Its two regiments of armored infantry, its tank regiment, and its tank destroyer battalion had totaled slightly more than 7,000 combat effectives and over 200 tanks and tank destroyers at full strength; on 24 July only about 2,200 combat troops and perhaps 45 serviceable armored vehicles held the main line of resistance. These organic troops of *Panzer Lehr* and its attached units were to receive the full force of the COBRA bombardment.

The *Panzer Lehr* front extended about three miles along the Périers-St. Lô highway. Several small infantry groups formed centers of resistance on an outpost line north of the highway, but most of the troops were deployed just south of the road. On the left (west) the attached parachute regiment had formed a strongpoint and roadblock near the road to Marigny. On the right (east) *Kampfgruppe Heinz*, near the village of Hébécrevon, had organized five strongpoints, each in the strength of a reinforced infantry platoon with a few tanks or tank destroyers and light anti-tank guns. In the center, organic infantry and tanks had erected three strongpoints, each in battalion strength, between Marigny and St. Gilles, and three

smaller roadblocks to cover the highway to St. Gilles and secondary roads near the village of la Chapelle-en-Juger. If the Americans succeeded in crossing the Périers-St. Lô highway, Bayerlein was prepared to commit regimental reserves—several companies of infantry and a few tanks—located along a country road just south of and parallel to the main highway.

Except for the combatants, the battlefield was deserted. Most of the French inhabitants had evacuated their homes and departed the battle zone. The few who remained in the COBRA area took refuge in isolated farmhouses, most of them, fortunately, outside the air bombardment target.⁸

Bombardment

Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory had set the COBRA H Hour at 1300, 24 July, and on the morning of 24 July he went to Normandy to observe the operation. He found the sky overcast, the clouds thick. Deciding that visibility was inadequate for the air attack, he ordered a postponement. Unfortunately, he was too late. The message announcing his decision reached England only a few minutes before the actual bombing was to commence in France. Although the planes were ordered to return without making their bomb runs, it was impossible to get them all back.

In accordance with the original planning, six groups of fighter-bombers of the IX TAC and three bombardment di-

⁸ Joseph Toussaint, *La Percée Américaine à l'Ouest de Saint-Lô (La Chapelle-Enjuger dans la Bataille)* (Coutances, France: Editions Notre-Dame, n.d.), pp. 75ff.

visions (about 1,600 heavy bombers) of the Eighth U.S. Air Force had departed their bases in England and headed toward France. Only the medium bombers, scheduled to bomb last, had not left the ground when the postponement order came. Of the six groups of fighter-bombers in the air, three received the recall order before they dropped their bombs. The other three bombed the general target area, the narrow strip, and certain targets north of the Périers-St. Lô highway, with no observed results. The postponement message to the heavy bombers stayed only a few planes in the last formation.

Ignorant that COBRA had been postponed, pilots of the great majority of the heavy bombers guided their big craft on toward the target. Because no precise radio channels had been designated for emergency communication, there was no certain means of transmitting the news to the planes. While air force personnel in France attempted to get word to the craft aloft, the first formation of 500 planes arrived over the target area. Fortunately, they found visibility so poor that no attack was made. The second formation found cloud conditions so bad that only 35 aircraft, after making three bomb runs to identify the target, released their loads. Over 300 bombers of the third formation, with slightly improved weather conditions, dropped their bombs—about 550 tons of high explosive and 135 tons of fragmentation—before the postponement message finally got through to cancel the remainder of the strike.⁹

The 24 July bombing was unfortunate,

not only because of the likelihood of negating the surprise planned for COBRA, but also because it killed 25 men and wounded 131 of the 30th Division.¹⁰ The tragedy was the result of one accident. The lead bombardier of a heavy bomber formation had had difficulty moving his bomb release mechanism and had inadvertently salvoed a portion of his load. The fifteen aircraft flying in the formation followed his example and released their bombs. The bomb load fell 2,000 yards north of the Périers-St. Lô highway.¹¹

On the ground, VII Corps had executed the initial part of the COBRA attack by withdrawing the front-line troops of the 9th and 30th Divisions several hundred yards to the north. The poor weather conditions had prompted commanders to wonder whether the lack of visibility would cancel the air bombardment, but General Collins was characteristically optimistic. He believed that the planes would get through the haze. Even if the heavy bombers were not able to take part in the air attack, he felt that the fighter-bombers would be on hand

⁹ The death of a liaison officer who was sent from the 8th Infantry (4th Division) to the 120th Infantry (30th Division) is included in these figures, which are taken from F. P. Halas' Notes, ML-2244. General Collins' Talk cites the same figures. *ARGUMENT to V-E Day*, page 230, gives the casualty figures as 16 killed and 64 wounded.

¹⁰ *AAF III*, 228-30; Eighth AF Tactical Mission Rpt, Opn 492, 24 Jul, USAF Hist Sec Files.

¹¹ *AAF III*, 230. Other short bomb releases did not affect the ground troops: one fighter-bomber pilot made a mistake in landmark identification and dropped his bombs on an American ammunition dump; when another plane was hit by enemy flak, a bombardier in a reflex action touched the toggle switch, released his load on an American airfield, and thereby destroyed two bomb-loaded and manned aircraft on the ground and damaged others. Enemy antiaircraft artillery fire destroyed three heavy bombers that participated in the attack.



ADVANCING TOWARD PÉRIERS-ST. LÔ ROAD. *4th Division advance patrol passes tanks awaiting orders to move up.*

and that their bombardment would give sufficient impetus for the attack. He therefore told his subordinate commanders to go ahead. If the fighter-bomber effort proved insufficient, he expected the heavy bombers to return on the following day.¹²

Notice that the air bombardment had been postponed reached the ground troops a short time before the bombardment actually commenced. What then was the meaning of the bombs that were dropped? What was the mission of the ground troops? Was COBRA delayed? Or were the ground troops to initiate COBRA on the basis of the incomplete air effort?

While discussion took place at higher headquarters, General Collins decided that the VII Corps had to attack. Withdrawal of the 9th and 30th Divisions had created a vacuum that the Germans would fill unless the infantry returned to the vicinity of the Périers-St. Lô highway. If COBRA was to start without benefit of the full air preparation, the infantry could simply continue the attack, cross the line of departure at the highway, and attempt to pry open the Marigny-St. Gilles gap. If, on the other hand, postponement in the air meant postponement on the ground, then the same conditions on which the COBRA plan was based had to be restored. General Collins therefore told the 9th, 4th, and 30th Divisions, the units sched-

¹² Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 1115, 24 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

uled to initiate the COBRA offensive, to make a limited objective attack to the Périers-St. Lô highway. Maybe they would continue beyond the highway, maybe not.¹³

Half an hour later General Collins learned that COBRA was postponed on the ground as well as in the air, but to prevent the enemy from moving north of the Périers-St. Lô highway, the three infantry divisions were to attack at 1300 as though COBRA were going into effect. In reality, the divisions were to restore the front line that had existed before the air bombardment.¹⁴ If the incomplete air bombardment had not forewarned the Germans and destroyed the tactical surprise on which General Bradley counted so heavily, the German main line of resistance would be unchanged for another COBRA effort on the following day. Until COBRA kicked off as planned, the divisions in the VII Corps exploiting force were to remain in their concealed bivouacs.¹⁵

The abortive air bombardment on 24 July had obviously alerted the Germans to the American ground attack that followed. Enemy artillery fire began to fall in large volume. All three assault divisions had a difficult time that afternoon.

On the corps right, the 9th Division committed its three regiments: the 60th Infantry battled enemy troops that had

infiltrated behind the withdrawal; a reinforced battalion of the 47th Infantry struggled until dark to gain a single hedgerow; two battalions of the 39th Infantry fought eight hours to reduce a strongpoint and took 77 casualties, among them the regimental commander, Col. Harry A. Flint.¹⁶ In the corps center, the 4th Division committed the 8th Infantry, which attacked in a column of battalions with tank support; after two hours of heavy fighting and a loss of 27 killed and 70 wounded, the regiment reached a point 100 yards north of the highway. On the corps left, the 30th Division did not advance at once because the assault elements were stunned and demoralized by the bombardment accident. It took almost an hour for the units to recover and reorganize, by which time enemy artillery fire had subsided. The division then advanced and reoccupied its original lines.

The bombardment accident released a flood of controversy. Having expected a lateral approach to the target area, General Bradley was astonished and shocked when he learned that the planes had made a perpendicular bomb run. Using a perpendicular approach, Bradley said later, was an act of perfidy on the part of the Air Forces, "a serious breach of good faith in planning."¹⁷ Other ground commanders had also anticipated a lateral approach, and their surprise was deepened by the horror that the news of casualties brought.¹⁸ Even General Quesada, the commander of the

¹³ Telecons, Collins and Hobbs, 1205, 24 Jul, and Stephens and Hassenfelt, 1207, 24 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; 4th Div Msg (Gen Barton), 1200, 24 Jul, 4th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

¹⁴ Telecon, Collins and Hobbs, 1227, 24 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; Ltr, Collins to Hechler, 7 Jul 45, OCMH Files; FUSA Msg, 1235, 24 Jul, FUSA G-3 Jnl; 4th Div Msg, 1315, 24 Jul, 4th Div G-3 Jnl and File.

¹⁵ VII Corps Opns Memo 47, 24 Jul.

¹⁶ Colonel Flint was posthumously awarded the Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to the DSC he had earlier received.

¹⁷ Bradley, *Soldier's Story*, pp. 341, 346-48.

¹⁸ Hobbs Telecons, 1330 and 1412, 24 Jul, 30th Div G-3 Jnl and File; Sylvan Diary, 24 Jul.