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REPORT NO. 50
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

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THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE
INFORMATION FROM GERMAN SOURCES

Part II: Invasion and Battle of Normandy
(6 Jun - 22 Aug 44)

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NOTE

Each first quotation from a source is fully referenced. Subsequent references are abbreviated.

To find the full reference for an abbreviated one, turn to "List of German Sources".

The first paragraph number opposite a given title indicates the paragraph with the full reference.

ABBREVIATIONSAmerican

O.C.M.H.	Office of the Chief of Military History
F.S.B.	Foreign Studies Branch
G.M.D.S.	German Military Documents Section
O.N.I.	Office of Naval Intelligence

German

OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Armed Forces High Command
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres Army High Command
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine Navy High Command
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe Air Force High Command
WFSt	Wehrmachtsfuehrungsstab Armed Forces Operations Staff
SKL	Seekriegsleitung Naval Operations Staff
O.B.	Oberbefehlshaber Commander-in-Chief
AOK	Armeeoberkommando (used for "Army Headquarters" and/or "Army Cmdr")
Chef	Chef des Generalstabes Chief of Staff (from Corps level up)
K.G.	Kommandierender General Commanding General (used for Corps Cmdrs only)

Others

G.S.C.	General Staff Corps
G.A.F.	German Air Force

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REPORT NO. 50
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

14 Oct 52

THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE
INFORMATION FROM GERMAN SOURCES

Part II: Invasion and Battle of Normandy

1. General information on the German anti-invasion preparations in 1943 and 1944 and on the German situation in the West on the eve of the Allied assault has been set forth in Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 40, German Defence Preparations in the West. The present report continues to deal with the assault phase of the invasion and the course of events in the Battle of Normandy. Mainly on the basis of contemporary German source materials it shows how the German Armies were destroyed by Allied superiority in all arms, and their downfall hastened by German blunders at the highest level of command.
2. Background information on the early phases of German coast defence preparations in the West has been supplied in Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 36, The Development of the German Defences in the Dieppe Sector, 1940 - 1942. A detailed description of the German preparations and dispositions in the Canadian sector of assault has been presented in Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 41, The German Defences in the Courseulles - St. Aubin Area of the Normandy Coast.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION*

3. The bulk of the supporting evidence for this report consists of original contemporary German military documents, which it has been possible, thanks to the unfailing courtesy and cooperation of all concerned, to take on loan from, have reproduced by, or inspect on the premises of one or another of the following United States agencies:

United States Department of the Army,
The Adjutant General's Office, German Military
Documents Section, Washington, D.C. (G.M.D.S.);

*Paras 3 - 6 repeated from H.S. Report No. 40

United States Department of the Army,
Office of the Chief of Military History*
(O.C.M.H.), Washington, D.C. Foreign Studies
Branch;

United States Navy, Naval Records and
Library, Washington, D.C.

4. A certain amount of additional information has been derived from some of the very large number of studies, which have been prepared since the conclusion of the Second World War by former German senior officers for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C.

5. In all cases where the reproduction of a source document is being permanently retained by Hist Sec (G.S.), the first reference to the document is followed by the Hist Sec (G.S.) Master Index Number.

6. Original documents from divisional or lower levels were available only in a few isolated cases; the greater part of this material is known to be in Russian hands. Underlined portions of quotations have been underlined in accordance with the original text. Subject matter enclosed in round brackets appeared so in the original text; subject matter enclosed in square brackets did not appear in the original text but has been added for clarification.

INVASION ALERT AND EARLY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SITUATION

7. During the first days of June the German coast defences from Cherbourg to Ostend had been pounded from the air with tantalizing impartiality. There was nothing to indicate which sector of the coast between these ports had been selected for assault. Nor was it possible to draw conclusions from the routine pattern of more than 1400 Allied sorties flown over the occupied West during the hours of daylight on 5 Jun 44 (O.N.I. - Tambach Collection, U.D. German Naval Operations Staff (Seekriegsleitung) Jun 44, 5 Jun) (Photostat 981 HCN (D2)). At the time when the Allied armada was moving towards the Continent most higher German commands in the West were in a mood of comparative complacency. Allied deception and security had been brilliant, German Intelligence had failed signally, last minute indications were not fully appreciated and there was no feeling that the 6th of June would be a day of decision. Realization of the fact that invasion was at hand came solely from operational reports. Some commanders were quick in grasping the situation, slower were those most firmly believing the Allies to be neither ready nor anxious to undertake the operation. (H.S. Report No. 40, paras 75 - 83)

*Previously styled: Historical Division, U.S. Dept of the Army.

8. A first and tentative warning came from the headquarters of Fifteenth Army at Turcoing. Major items recorded during the alert phase in the Army's War Diary were the following:

5 Jun 2233 hrs Preliminary warning to all Corps and Headquarters regarding intercepted code message pointing to invasion within 48 hours.

6 Jun 0120 hrs C. of S. 81 Corps* telephones C. of S. AOK 15**: Parachutists dropped in area of 711 Inf Div at Mont Canisy and at Div H.Q. Battle noises there. No details.

6 Jun 0130 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 instructs 1 Ops AOK 15*** to give orders for Alert II [highest degree of Alert] in the whole Army area, and to report to A Gp B.

Telephone conversation Cmdr AOK 15**** with Cmdr 81 Corps*****. Corps Commander confirms descents in area 711 Inf Div.

0145 hrs Alert II called for all Corps and Headquarters. Naval Commands, Air Commands and Military Governors informed.

(G.M.D.S. - 59364/1, Fifteenth Army, W.D. Jun 44)
(Photostat 981A15(D1))

9. To what state of impotence the German naval and air forces had been reduced was illustrated by their failure to observe the original false start and the subsequent approach of the invasion fleet. One would have expected to find some evidence of early warnings from the Navy, but at the very time when the Channel was crowded with Allied craft the Germans deemed "the weather" unfavourable for the movement of patrol boats (O.N.I. - Naval Group West, W.D. 1 - 7 Jun 44, p. 6229) (Photostat 981NGPW(D2)).***** When the Admiral of the Channel Coast reported numerous descents over the coast, Naval Group West, at 0130 hrs, grudgingly ordered Alert II, recording at the same time their concurrence with O.B. West's and

*Col Hubert Wiese, G.S.C.

**Lt Gen Rudolf Hoffmann

***Col Metzke, G.S.C.

****Col Gen Hans von Salmuth

*****Gen Pz Tps Adolf Friedrich Kuntzen

*****The important long-range radar reconnaissance installations of the Luftwaffe in the strongpoint Douvres (Canadian sector of assault) had been out of commission due to air attacks for several weeks already. (para 27 below)

Air Fleet's views that a major landing attempt was improbable (*ibid*, p. 6228). On rare occasions only does the annalist find cause for mirth in the tragic records of man's folly, but it would be difficult to miss the unconscious humour in the account of the invasion alert by the war diarist of Naval Group West. Under the heading "Enemy Major Landing" he recorded with professional fidelity the initial disinclination of the Naval Group to believe invasion was at hand. The first part of this detailed description of the events on 6 Jun appears as Appendix "A" to the present report. (*Ibid*, 6 Jun)

10. Apparently on their own initiative and independently, but almost simultaneously with Fifteenth Army, Seventh Army ordered Alert II at 0140 hrs. At 0130 hrs 84 Corps* had reported "parachute descents since 0105 hrs in the areas east and northwest of Caen, St. Marcove,** Montebourg, on both sides of the river Vire and on the east coast of the Cotentin" (W.D. Seventh Army, 6 Jun - 31 Jul 44, 6 Jun, U.S. Translation Vol II) (981S008(D8)). While no action had been taken on the earlier information about the intercepted messages, the jumps at the coast clearly called for immediate alert.

11. In his post-war narrative the Chief Intelligence Officer of Army Group B, Col Anton Staubwasser, claims O.B. West ordered him to desist from alerting the troops at the stage when the alarming intercepts were still the sole evidence of threatening danger:

On 5 Jun at approximately 2200 hrs the Third General Staff Officer of Fifteenth Army informed me by telephone that one of these code words had just been intercepted again, and that Fifteenth Army therefore had alerted its troops independently. I reported this immediately to my C. of S. Since A Gp B had no records whatsoever from which to judge the import of the intercepted code word, he instructed me to obtain a ruling from O.B. West. In the course of the ensuing telephone conversations, which I conducted personally, a duty officer -- after a brief interval -- conveyed to me on behalf of O.B. West the order to desist from alerting the troops.

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-675, Staubwasser, The Enemy Picture as seen by A Gp B before the Invasion) (English and German texts: 981SOM (D116))

12. A somewhat different version has been presented by Lt Gen Bodo Zimmermann (O.B. West's First Operations Officer from 26 Oct 40 - 11 May 45). According to Zimmermann the interception of the code word to the French resistance forces was reported to O.B. West at 2115

*Cmdr: Gen Arty Erich Marcks (killed 12 Jun 44)

**Presumably St. Marcouf near Montebourg

hrs 5 Jun. The matter was taken very seriously* and O.B. West warned all formations and administrative headquarters in the West:

... O.B. West ordered A Gp B to comply with all the requirements of Alert II throughout the entire coastal area. All other agencies were to be warned....

The headquarters receiving this order last, acknowledged receipt of the teletype message at about 0120 hrs 6 Jun....

At about 0215 hrs A Gp B telephoned the report of numerous parachute landings in Normandy... On the Cotentin fighting with air-landed enemy was already in progress... In the opinion of O.B. West this was definitely the opening phase of a landing to be expected at dawn....

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-308, Zimmermann, Lt Gen, "O.B. West from Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line, A Study in Command", English Text, paras 99 and 100) (981SOM(D94)) (Hereafter cited "A Study in Command")

13. In his situation report of 0445 hrs 6 Jun, O.B. West was rather vague on the subject of the alert, and refrained from stating the time of ordering Alert II (G.M.D.S. - H22/348, Misc OKH and O.B. West Docs, O.B. West Sitrep No. 4374/44, 0445 hrs 6 Jun 44) (Photostat 981CW(D26)). Zimmermann's statement in respect of Alert II may be correct, but his remark about O.B. West's early interpretation of the events as "definitely the opening phase of a landing" must, of course, be read quite literally; there is a vast difference between a mere landing and "the invasion".

14. Little light is shed on this subject by the few available documents from O.B. West's headquarters, but evidence from other sources shows O.B. West's tardiness in reaching a definite conclusion regarding the nature of the operations in progress at the coast. Indeed, with

*Zimmermann's claims in this respect are not impressive. In the War Diary of O.B. West's Assistant Chief of Staff for Supply and Administration the following was entered:

6 Jun

0300 hrs: Called 1 Ops (Zimmermann):

"Up to now the matter is not considered important".

(G.M.D.S. - 36450/1, W.D. O.B. West, 1 Jan-17 Aug 44, 6 Jun 44) (Period 6 - 21 Jun 44: Photostat 981CW(D36))

the German air and sea forces at bay, German Intelligence checked and defeated, and little operational information coming to hand, O.B. West was not in a position to tell immediately whether he was confronted by a big raid, a major diversion or the strategical main effort. On the other hand it cannot be overlooked that as early as 0445 hrs on 6 Jun his C. of S.* asked [vainly] for General Jodl's permission to employ if necessary the armoured divisions which had been earmarked as OKW Reserves. (Ibid)

15. With O.B. West groping in the dark, OKW was unable to fathom the situation. Information on OKW's early interpretations of the situation has been supplied by Maj Gen von Buttlar:**

The first reports of any enemy landing attempt began to flow to WFSt during the night 5/6 Jun roughly between 0300 and 0500 hrs. They came from various sources... They soon gave a comparatively clear picture of a fairly strong airborne landing in the area of the mouth of the Orne, but those concerning enemy naval activity and the attack on the coast still gave no reliable impression on the strength and the extent of the landing, up to about 1000 hrs 6 Jun.

The general impression by noon 6 Jun was approximately as follows:

a) Despite unfavourable weather conditions the enemy had attacked the German coastal fortifications at the mouth of the Orne and to the West of it, as well as between the Orne and the Vire, in combination with an airborne landing. The landing of the airborne troops was carried out in close tactical coordination with an attack from the sea; the attack was, for the moment, limited to a restricted area. There were, up to that time no indications that a major strategic operation was impending....

b) Fighting was in progress around the coastal fortifications and in the zone of resistance behind the coastal sector under attack; the local reserves disposed in Normandy had been committed promptly, especially 21 Pz Div.

c) No striking movements were to be observed in the Fifteenth Army Sector, nor, in particular, along the Channel Coast.

This picture of the situation corresponded entirely to the WFSt expectations with regard to the first phase of a large-scale invasion.

*Gen Inf Guenther Blumentritt, (C. of S. O.B. West 24 Sep 42 - 10 Sep 44).

**Maj Gen Treusch von Buttlar-Brandenfels, Horst (commonly known as von Buttlar), Chief of Army Operations WFSt from 12 Jan 42 to 15 Nov 44.

It left the question open, in the WFSt as well as in OKL and OKM, as to whether this was a tactical diversion, a strategic landing with a limited objective, or the prelude to the decisive main effort.

A telephone conversation with O.B. West's Operations Officer revealed that the O.B. West picture of the situation on the morning of 6 Jun was no clearer nor essentially more complete than that summarized above. The WFSt was not informed of any specific judgment by A Gp B, which was in command on the spot, and the WFSt was unaware of the absence of the Army Group Commander, Rommel.

In the general obscurity of the situation, O.B. West's request that the only strategic reserves in the West which could rapidly be made available (Pz Lehr and 12 SS Pz Div) be given orders to march, and then the report that they were already on the march, came as a surprise. The request was refused by Jodl. I do not know whether prior to this refusal the Chief of WFSt had obtained a decision from Hitler.

Col Gen Jodl based his refusal on the following considerations:

a) The picture of the situation at the time did not justify the opinion that the enemy's main landing operation had already begun....

("A Study in Command", op cit, Annex Five, quoting: O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-672, von Buttlar, O.B. West Command Relationships 1943-1945, Part 26 of 31 parts, paras 1-6)

16. In a formal report on 4 Jun 44 Admiral Krancke, Cmdr Naval Group West, had called the plainly discernible Allied evolutions "a mixture of bluff and preparations for a venture at a later date". "However", he hedged, "this estimate of the situation is fraught with unknown factors" (H.S. Report No. 40, op cit, para 79). At 0130 hrs 6 Jun Naval Group West was still unconvinced of the imminence of a major landing (para 9 above), but at 0445 hrs of the same day they were already complaining to the Naval Operations Staff about O.B. West's estimate of the situation being different from their own:

O.B. West, who has evidently received fewer reports, especially on the landing from the sea, is not yet convinced that invasion on a large scale has begun. At OKW too, as is apparent from a telephone conversation with WFSt/Ops/Navy, the views of Naval Group West and the Naval Operations Staff are not so far completely shared.....

(W.D. Skl, op cit, p. 104, 6 Jun 44)

Later in the morning the following was entered in the War Diary:

No doubt the enemy has succeeded to a certain extent in surprising the whole German defence mechanism. This not in the least due to his skilful choice of the time for execution under apparently unfavourable but steadily improving weather conditions. In the selection of the landing site the enemy was fortunate too....

(N.D. Naval Group West,
op cit, p. 6234)

17. On 4 Jun the Naval Operations Staff had recorded Naval Group's estimate of the landing possibilities for the night 5/6 Jun as "Improbable" for the Channel Coast and the Netherlands area, and "Possible" for the Atlantic Coast (W.D. Skl, op cit, 4 Jun 44, p. 62). It is well known that the invasion was launched under barely tolerable meteorological conditions as a calculated risk accepted on the basis of a predicted fleeting improvement in the weather. But at the time when the Allied Chief Meteorologist was making history's most momentous weather-forecast, the Germans were not in a state of acute apprehension; they noted that the weather was none too good and let it go at that. That the Allies embarked on the all-important venture under less than optimal conditions came to them as a surprise.*

18. At any rate suspense had now given way to action, and at some time during the day the Naval Operations Staff summed up the situation:

The invasion has begun. After almost continuous bombing of our defence positions on the Channel coast between Cherbourg and Ostend during the past few days and nights by most powerful air formations, from the military point of view the time was ripe for a large-scale landing attempt as soon as the weather was favourable. Although during the night 5/6 Jun the weather could not be regarded as at all favourable -- the wind was from the North-West, varying from 4 to 6 in strength, sometimes more, with the sky thickly covered and a low ceiling -- our opponent decided to risk the leap. His decision was evidently based on a forecast of improved weather conditions during the next few days, and thereby all reflections and

*As on any other day, on 5 Jun 44 Naval Group West recorded a number of meteorological data without comment. But from the War Diary of the Naval Operations Staff it would appear that the Naval Group had revised its estimate in the sense that a landing on the Channel and Dutch Coast was now possible (Ibid, p. 82, 5 Jun 44). In the absence of supporting evidence from other sources, however, this statement must be taken with some reservations. Evidently the entry was added as an afterthought, on a different typewriter, in different alignment and with a curious misspelling. While it is possible that the estimate from the Naval Group was received after the days entries had been made, it is not unlikely that the item was added ex post facto to save face.

speculations have been ended. The tension which weighed heavily on all has been lifted. For Germany the war has entered its final phase. Once more there is an opportunity to force a quick decision by a short but furious passage of arms. After proclamations and addresses by the enemy Commanders-in-Chief, Heads of State and Ministers having announced this to the world ceremoniously and in a more or less graceful fashion, there is no question but that the great "decision-seeking operation" against Europe is actually under way. Any doubt on the subject is no longer possible, since even during the early morning hours the vast scope of the enemy's military effort can be seen.

(W.D. Skl, op cit, p. 93)

At 0240 hrs OKW/WFSt/Ops (Navy) was informed by telephone: "C.-in-C. Navy has cut short his leave and is returning to his headquarters during the morning."

(Ibid, p. 94)

19. Logically enough Alert II was declared first in the area where the parachute descents were taking place. The initial defence of the "Caen Sector" (from Asnelles (excl) to east of Merville-Franceville Plage (east of the Orne)) was the responsibility of 716 Inf Div. A good deal of information on the Division's defence operations on 6 Jun has been supplied by Lt Gen Richter. On the alert phase he wrote in part:*

During the night 5/6 Jun the troops and reserves of 716 Inf Div which were in line were in a state of normal preparedness... (c)

Since no special reports about the enemy were received until the moment when enemy activities were observed first, and since no unusual conditions of weather and tides were facilitating aggressive operations from the sea and air, neither Corps nor Division had ordered a state of increased alert... (c)

In spite of this the troops could not be and were not taken by surprise because:

The crews in the resistance nests were fully prepared, the combat posts and heavy weapons were manned, the staffs were in their command posts... (c)

The first report of the airborne landings came by telephone from cmdr 736 Regt on hill 61 on 6 Jun at about 0040 hrs. He had just received word of parachute descents east of the

*Passages marked (c) are quoted from Richter's contemporary report; passages marked (n) are quoted from Richter's post-war narrative, both contained in the volume referred to at end of para 19.

Orne. About ten to fifteen minutes later he reported continuation of the descents. In his opinion it was not just a matter of landing combat teams, as had occurred frequently before, but the beginning of the invasion. He had therefore ordered Alert II for [Coast Defence Group] Riva Bella. I was of the same opinion and ordered Alert II for the Division at about 0100 hrs.... (n)

Upon the telephone report to Corps at about 0100 hrs no further orders emanated from there, as far as I remember, since all the necessary orders had been or were just being given by the Division. (n)

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-621, Richter, Wilhelm, Lt Gen, Cmr 716 Inf Div, The Battle of 716 Inf Div in Normandy, 6-23 Jun 44, including detailed contemporary Operations Report for 6 Jun 44) (German and English texts: 981SOM(D97)). - See also H.S. Report No. 41, op cit, para 26)

D DAY (6 JUN)

General Aspects

20. A broad picture of the German Order of Battle and dispositions in the West in general and in the Caen sector in particular has been supplied in Hist Sec (G.S.) Reports Nos. 40 and 41 (paras 1 and 2 above). The coastal defence sector Caen was held by 716 Inf Div, on its right was 711 Inf Div, on the left was 352 Inf Div, further west and northwest the invading forces were to meet elements of 91 Airborne and 709 Inf Divs. Events during this phase in the sectors west of 716 Inf Div are not being dealt with in detail in the present report.

21. The sole substantial armoured formation immediately available to Seventh Army (Le Mans) was 21 Pz Div with headquarters at St. Pierre-sur-Dives. It was scattered in four groups on both sides of the Orne from north to south of Caen over an area nearly 30 miles deep and 15 miles wide. Also south of the Seine, and within distances allowing reasonably quick intervention, but in the area of Fifteenth Army and earmarked as OKW Reserves, were 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div (G.M.D.S. - OKW, Army General Staff, Sit Maps West, Sit Map 6 Jun 44) (Photostat 981.004(D2)); (G.M.D.S. - 57351/10, Seventh Army, Sit Map 5 Jun 44) (Photostat 981A7(D2)); (See also H.S. Report No. 41, op cit, para 60). At Le Merlerault, approximately 14 miles east-southeast of Argentan, was Headquarters 1 SS Pz Corps (Sit Maps Seventh Army, 5 Jun 44, cited above). It was ready to assume control of such a combination of armoured divisions as circumstances might require.

22. With regard to the placing of the large reserves the Germans had long been in a quandary. Keeping the mobile formations far back would facilitate quicker delivery of counter-attacks with all the impetus of massed forces, safeguard the lateral mobility needed to cope with surprise attacks and keep the most valuable units away from the fury of initial bombardments.

Conversely, the insufficient strength of the coastal divisions, and the certainty of deterioration spreading in geometrical progression with every additional moment lost, suggested keeping the armour close to the coast. In view of the complete Allied mastery of the air there was no clear-cut answer to the problem except, perhaps, foretelling quick defeat in any case. It will be seen below that in the event the expected difficulties were compounded into disaster because Hitler had discarded sound high command practice for the sake of his own devices.

23. Some general information on the early developments of 6 Jun is shown here in the form of paraphrased excerpts from the Operations Log of Seventh Army:

0215 hrs C. of S. Seventh Army* to C. of S.
A Gp B:**

Confirms airborne landings mainly in vicinity of 716 Inf Div, southern eastcoast of Cotentin and diagonally through 91 Airb Div... C. of S. AOK 7 suggests placing 91 Airb Div under AOK 7. C. of S. A Gp G considers it still as a local affair, C. of S. AOK 7 thinks it is a major operation.

0235 hrs 91 Airb Div placed under 84 Corps...

0440 hrs 1 Ops 84 Corps reports:

1 and 3 Bty 1716 Arty Regt attacked by groups from cargo gliders. 1 Bty engaged in hand to hand fighting; 3 Bty out of commission.

0520 hrs Cmdr 21 Pz Div*** to C. of S. AOK 7:

... 21 Pz Div has sent out strong reconnaissance patrols and started attacks on both sides of the Orne estuary. Main effort east of the Orne.

0645 hrs 21 Pz Div was placed under AOK 7, and elements 21 Pz Div under cmdr 125 Pz Gren Regt [21 Pz Div] have been committed against airborne enemy on both sides of the Orne.

0700 hrs C. of S. AOK 7 informs Cmdr 84 Corps:

21 Pz Div to be placed under 84 Corps; 12 SS Pz Div to move forward to Lisieux area...

*Pemsel, Max, Maj Gen (Lt Gen on 9 Nov 44) C. of S. Seventh Army (20 May 43 - 30 Jul 44)

**Speidel, Dr. Hans, Lt Gen, C. of S. A Gp B (15 Apr - 1 Sep 44)

***Feuchtinger, Edgar, Maj Gen (Lt Gen on 1 Aug 44) Cmdr 21 Pz Div (1 Jun 43 - Dec 44)

0900 hrs 84 Corps to AOK 7:

Strong seaborne landings of infantry and tank forces beginning at 0715 hrs. Landings on both sides of Orne, particularly west of the Orne at Bernieres, Asnelles, Meuvaines and Grandcamp.

(I.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl., Vol II, op cit, 6 Jun 44)

24. Shortly after midnight on 6 Jun Fifteenth Army wanted 12 SS Pz Div (OKW Reserve) moved up from the Orleans-Chartres area for the task of clearing the east bank of the Orne of airlanded enemy. Eventually the Division was moved up to the Lisieux area, but in the meantime its presence west of Caen had become of much greater urgency and it was placed under Seventh Army and 1 SS Pz Corps. The early steps regarding the prospective employment of the Division are briefly summarized below from entries in the War Diary of Fifteenth Army:

0145 hrs AOK requests moving-up 12 SS Pz Div
0245 hrs Request repeated
0350 hrs Request renewed [Speidel evasive]
0430 hrs Request now made to A Gp D; Blumentritt will suggest it to OKW
0510 hrs Blumentritt states order for moving up 12 SS Pz Div was given by O.B. West to A Gp B twenty minutes ago.
0550 hrs A Gp B informs AOK 15 that 12 SS now under A Gp B and ordered to Bernay-Lisieux area.
1615 hrs Speidel to AOK 15: 12 SS Pz Div required for clearing Calvados bridgehead in combination with 21 Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div under 1 SS Pz Corps.

(W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 6 Jun 44)

For those specifically interested this information is repeated below in greater detail:

0145 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to C. of S. A Gp B: Requests alerting and moving up 12 SS Pz Div. Recce elements ahead... Answer: "No".
0215 hrs C. of S. 81 Corps to C. of S. AOK 15: 81 Corps in contact with 12 SS Pz Div regarding reconnoitring... Answer: I have asked A Gp B for recce by 12 SS as early as 0130 hrs.

0245 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to 1 Int A Gp B:*
Renewed request for recce by 12 SS

0337 hrs 1 Ops A Gp B** to 1 Ops AOK 15:
Elements 12 SS Pz Div employed in recce
towards Pont L'Eveque...

0345 hrs C. of S. 81 Corps to C. of S. AOK 15:
Renewed request for moving up 12 SS Pz Div...

0350 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to C. of S. A Gp B:
Renewed request for moving up 12 SS Pz Div.
Reply Speidel: 12 SS has been alerted and
instructed to send out recce elements.

0430 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to C. of S. A Gp D:
Estimate of situation: 12 SS Pz Div ought
to be committed in area of 711 Div, not
used for recce purposes. Reply Blumentritt:
This good suggestion will be discussed in
this sense with OKW. Reply follows.

0455 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to 1 Ops A Gp B:
Same request as at 0430 hrs to A Gp D.
Reply requested.

0510 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to 1 Ops A Gp D:
What about 12 SS? Reply: Twenty minutes
ago O.B. West gave orders to A Gp B for
moving up 12 SS Pz Div to rear of 711 Inf
Div in a manner making possible immediate
intervention [if ordered].

0525 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 to C. of S. A Gp B:
Re 12 SS? Reply Speidel: 12 SS Pz Div
has received orders for moving to Lisieux
area so that immediate intervention in
area 711 Inf Div possible. Recce ahead.

0550 hrs 1 Ops A Gp B to 1 Ops AOK 15:
12 SS Pz Div has been placed under A Gp B
and given orders for moving immediately
to the line Bernay [ESE Lisieux] -
Lisieux. Div immediately to establish
liaison with 81 Corps and 711 Inf Div.

1105 hrs 1 Ops AOK 7 to 1 Ops AOK 15:
Between flooded area on the Army boundary
and the Orne AOK 7 has no forces to cope
with the situation. Only an Eastern
battalion is there. 21 Pz Div is dealing
with the situation west of the Orne. AOK 7
requests commitment of elements 711 Inf
Div in the area east of the Orne.
Reply: Reserves of 711 Inf Div are
numerically weak and will arrive too late.
It would seem better to commit elements
12 SS Pz Div in that area. Therefore, at
1125 hrs, declines request of AOK 7.

*Staubwasser, Anton, Col, G.S.C., 1 Int A Gp B

**von Tempelhoff, Hans Georg, Col, G.S.C., 1 Ops A Gp B.

1430 hrs A Gp B to 1 Ops AOK 15:
Elimination of bridgehead east of the Orne necessary today. For this commitment of 12 SS Pz Div necessary. Reply: Request has been made; consent from OKW expected soon.

1615 hrs C. of S. AOK 15 and C. of S. A Gp B:
...
Speidel: Beachhead on Calvados (18 km wide) to be eliminated by 1 SS Pz Corps (Sepp Dietrich) with 21 Pz Div and 12 SS Pz Div. In addition Pz Lehr Div moving up. Sepp Dietrich moving up Pz Lehr Div, but the formation for the moment remaining directly under A Gp B.

1735 hrs C. of S. AOK 7 to C. of S. AOK 15:
Enemy main pressure in beachhead is towards Caen. Benouville in enemy hand. Attack by 21 Pz Div now under way, 12 SS Pz Div's not before tomorrow, Pz Lehr Div's even later.

1750 hrs 1 Ops A Gp B to 1 Ops AOK 15:
1 SS Pz Corps committed against beachhead; 12 SS Pz Div arriving on 7 Jun, Pz Lehr Div on 8 Jun.

(loc cit)

Events in Canadian Sector

25. German dispositions in the Caen sector have been described in Hist Sec (G.S.) Report No. 41 (op cit). The most authentic source of information on events in the Canadian sector is Richter's narrative based on his contemporary operations report (Richter, "The Battle of 716 Inf Div in Normandy", op cit).

26. At about 0100 hrs the whole Division was placed on highest alert. 21 Pz Div was informed and followed suit. The first engagements took place along both banks of the Orne (Richter, op cit, (Narrative) pp 10-12). Further west the defence of the sector to be invaded by the Canadians was primarily the task of 2 Bn 736 Gren Regt. According to Richter a minor engagement occurred in this sector before the Canadians landed. 8/736 (the fourth company of 2 Bn 736) was lost in fighting against airlanded elements between Bernieres and Tailleville:

At 0510 hrs [6 Jun] 2 Bn 736 reported that the enemy had made airborne landings south of Bernieres and north of Tailleville (H.Q. 2 Bn 736) and had penetrated into Bernieres pushing northward. Immediately 2 Bn 736 (Tailleville) and 2 Bn 726 (Banville) each launched a reinforced company against this enemy. The Division ordered the elements of 2 Bn 726 to return to their positions in order to prevent dissipation of forces. The attack by 8/736 faltered due to naval fire and was beaten off. Nobody returned, so the details are not known.... The terrain lacked cover, our arty was insufficient and the Luftwaffe failed to neutralize enemy arty and to keep out the enemy air force, and even failed to prevent their observation. How much the enemy parachutists have contributed to the capture of Bernieres I

cannot state, since no further reports were received from the resistance nests and the officers who were dispatched to investigate did not return.

(loc cit)

27. Before the main forces hit the shore, specialist forces had cleared lanes across the minefields, and:

at about 0730 hrs landings of enemy infantry and tanks began. The landings took place simultaneously on three points of main effort:

1. Asnelles - Meuvaines
2. Courseulles - Bernieres
3. Lion-sur-Mer - Colleville road and beach.

At all three beachheads the coast was protected only by field emplacements and reinforced field emplacements. The strongpoint of Courseulles, located between beachheads 1 and 2 and more strongly fortified in some positions and the strongpoint of Rivabella, located east of beachhead 3 and partly more strongly fortified were greatly impeded in their effectiveness before and during the landing as the result of heavy fire from ships and bombers and of smoke screens. Beach obstacles were not in the same depth in beachhead areas 2 and 3 in the western half as on the rest of the coast, since at these places stakes could not be driven into the ground because of rocky reefs, at least this could not be accomplished with the limited means which the division had at its disposal. It is remarkable that landings at these places had been declared quite improbable because they would be too dangerous, in the opinion of the Navy, Seekommandant Cherbourg, which had been formed earlier. The laying of seamines instead of building stake obstacles was to be carried out by the Navy but had not yet taken place, because the transport of mines from Cherbourg was difficult as every transport was sunk by the enemy air force. Emergency mines, constructed by the army and planted instead of seamines proved to be inadequate as was expected. These mines were made of large wooden basins filled with stones and explosives, planted on the bottom of the sea on each side of the rock reefs and attached to beams floating on the surface of the water. If a ship should touch the beam the charge should explode. Every time that a strong tide occurred, the beams were torn off and deposited on the beach.

(loc cit)

28. Subsequent events in the Canadian sector were described by Richter in the following passages:

Near Courseulles - Bernieres the enemy had landed with tanks and infantry at 0730 hrs and had advanced towards the South. The command post of 2 Bn 736 in Tailleville was surrounded several times in the course of the day, but could free itself again. The last report from the commander of 2 Bn 736 came at 1548 hrs. After that the unit was driven together in a small area but still held. (Ibid, p. 16)

As mentioned, by 1600 hrs the remainder of the command post 2 Bn 736 in Tailleville had been surrounded. The enemy had advanced across Tailleville to the South and had surrounded the Luftwaffe strongpoint Douvres. Here the long-range reconnaissance installations of the Luftwaffe were located. They had been destroyed by enemy fighter planes about three weeks earlier, but the strongpoint garrison of 230 men, reinforced by stragglers, had the following weapons:

5 cm Pak	3
5 cm KwK	3
2 cm Flak	6
Hy MG	4
LMG	16
Flamethrowers	12
Hy Mortars	3
Lt Mortars	1

The commander of the strongpoint, Lt Col Igle, was a brave and capable officer. With his men he repelled all enemy attacks and held the position until 15 or 16 Jun. Since telephone connections were not interrupted (fortress-type telephone cable two metres underground) he was able to carry out continuous observation of all enemy movements within range of observation. This enabled him to supply divisional headquarters with valuable tactical information. In the days which followed enemy preparations for attacks and for the assault on Douvres could frequently be countered successfully by the remainder of 716 Inf Div artillery and 21 Pz Div artillery using Douvres as an observation post. (Ibid, p. 21-22)

...In the evening the situation [on the left wing] cleared up to the extent that the enemy was held up in his drive southward in the general line Breoy - Thaon.... (Ibid, p. 24)

...By evening the strongpoints from the left division boundary to Courseulles were in the hands of the enemy. The strongpoints of St. Aubin, Lagrune, Luc-sur-Mer were still in our possession. According to reliable reports they were still firing on the morning of 7 Jun. Douvres and H.Q. 736 Regt (Hill 61) were still in our hands, with telephone and radio communications still functioning. (Ibid, p. 24)

Reasons for Defeat of 716 Inf Div

29. In view of the weight of the allied assault and the absence of quick and forceful German intervention the early collapse of 716 Inf Div was a foregone conclusion. Richter's list of contributory factors is quoted below in full; it is of interest less for the obvious reasons named than for a number of individual factors revealing deficiencies of the German defence preparations:

1. Failure of all reconnaissance (sea and air);
2. complete lack of support from the Luftwaffe, which might have engaged the landing fleets and landed forces;
3. neither the off-shore obstacles nor the stakes produced the results which were hoped for, particularly because these measures had not been completed everywhere;
4. the large minefields laid by the troops did not produce the desired results because heavy bombings and fire from naval guns caused premature explosions;
5. large gaps were torn in the coastal defences as a result of the field works and reinforced field works not being strong enough to resist heavy bombings and fire from naval guns;
6. dense smoke screens handicapped the aiming of fire against ships and landed troops;
7. lack of effective anti-tank defence, as two anti-tank companies were destroyed in their field emplacements by bombings;
8. the German artillery was put out of action at an early stage as a result of bombing, shelling by ship's artillery and attack by airborne troops;
9. effective air reconnaissance and espionage (as shown by captured documents) enabled the enemy to prepare the attack in all details, and
10. the failure of an Eastern battalion which had been considered as reliable.

Apart from these weaknesses in the coastal defence, the following factors led to the breakthrough:

- a) The reserves located close to the coast were too weak to hold up such a massed attack by an enemy continually reinforcing himself....
- b) the moving of operational reserves was much delayed by the absolute enemy air superiority;
- c) the absence of a second fortified line echeloned in depth.

(Ibid, (Contemporary Report) pp 65-68)

Casualties of 716 Inf Div

30. On the eve of the assault the personnel of 716 Inf Div was within 1% of authorized strength. The formation lacked tanks and assault guns, but the lack of guns had been counterbalanced by placing elements of G.H.Q. and 21 Pz Div artillery under the direct command of the Division. By last light on D Day the Division had been wrecked. Of a total of four German and two Eastern battalions, there remained one German battalion (less 20% casualties); all other battalions were mere remnants. The artillery suffered to the same degree, by evening it had been reduced to 1/5 of its initial strength, there were six guns left west of the Orne, and five or six on the east bank. Anti-tank elements had lost 75% of their initial strength, anti-aircraft elements about 2/3 and others about 1/3.*

(Ibid, (Narrative) pp 40-41)

Intervention by 21 Pz Div

31. The first armoured division to intervene in the fighting near the coast was 21 Pz Div. At first it was intended to use the formation for clearing the area east of the Orne, but with the Calvados coast emerging as the focal area of the Allied effort the bulk of the Division was committed late in the afternoon of D-Day to a counter-attack in the general direction of Lion-sur-Mer. The attack virtually reached the coast; had it not been halted [according to the German sources] mainly due to airlandings in the rear it might have turned into a serious threat to the Canadian forces moving towards the line Thaon - Creully.

32. Fuehrer Directive No. 40, of 23 Mar 42 (Hist Sec Report No. 36, para 37), had stressed the necessity of one commander being fully in charge of any given coastal defence sector. When 21 Pz Div was called to intervene in the Caen sector the situation arose, therefore, of a high class mobile division coming temporarily under the capable but armour-wise inexperienced commander of a lowly coastal division. In his narrative Richter repeatedly refers to the "orders" he gave 21 Pz Div at 0200 hrs and later during the early hours of the morning (Richter (Narrative) p. 11). But even according to his own contemporary operations report the formation was not formally placed under his command until 1030 hrs (Ibid, (Contemporary Report) p. 61). With the spectre of defeat in front and that of court martial in the rear, command arrangements at the time had to be handled gingerly. Richter's position as sector commander should have placed him automatically in charge, but the command situation was vague because, as General von Geyr says:

... the main body of 21 Pz Div had received strict orders not to move; it was not to be

*On 15 Jun, in a telephone conversation with a staff officer of Seventh Army, C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps requested that the headquarters staff of 716 Inf Div be brought back to full strength, and added: "It is intended to form two battalions from the remnants of the Division" (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl. Vol II, op cit, 2310 hrs, 15 Jun)

committed without the consent of Field Marshal Rommel. Thus it happened that these troops had to stand by as spectators while enemy paratroopers jumped on their comrades. (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-466, Gen Pz Frhr Geyr von Schweppenburg, Pz Gp West, Mid 43 - 5 Jul 44, p. 21) (981SOM (D54))

33. Some time before 0645 hrs 21 Pz Div had been placed under Seventh Army (W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, 0645 hrs 6 Jun). Shortly thereafter, in a telephone call at 0700 hrs, Seventh Army placed the Division under 84 Corps (para 22 above; O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-784, von Criegern, 84 Corps in Normandy, p. 10) (981SOM (D129)). General of Panzer Troops Freiherr Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg (hereafter referred to as von Geyr) writes that at about 1000 hrs Marcks, Feuchtinger and Richter conferred at the latter's headquarters in Caen (von Geyr, op cit, p. 21). Thereupon, at 1035 hrs, 84 Corps informed Seventh Army of its intention to commit 21 Pz Div west of the Orne. (W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, et al)

34. By approximately 1600 hrs the spearheads of 21 Pz Div finally established contact with the opponent and according to all sources, were making good progress.*

* ...The attack reached the height of Lion and appeared to be leading to complete success -- reaching and clearing the coast --, when the enemy dropped strong numbers of airborne troops south of Lion. While the German task force deployed troops against this enemy in order to keep its rear free, further enemy airborne troops were landed in the area Plumetot - Hermanville - Plumiers (sic) [presumably Periers]. These troops did not only jump into 100 Pz Regt (21 Pz Div), which was committed in this area while it was attacking and brought it to a standstill, but also threatened to finish the closing in of Assault Group 192 south of Lion in cooperation with the enemy airborne troops mentioned before. 21 Pz Div ordered Group 192 to fight its way back to Anguerny - Cazelles. This movement was completed by 2000 hrs.

(Richter: (Narrative) p. 23)

... A smart attack carried out yesterday afternoon by 21 Pz Div from north of Caen, reached the coast. Due to strong air attacks and numerous glider landings in the rear, the gains had to be abandoned in order to free the rear area. (W.D. Naval Group West, op cit, 7 Jun for 6 Jun, p. 6245)

... Counter-attacks by local reserves did not get through. A subsequent attack by 21 Pz Div made good progress at first, pushing forward as far as the coast. Then, however, in consequence of renewed airborne landings in the Caen area, they were forced to withdraw in order to clean up their own area.... (G.M.D.S. - H22/57, O.B. West. Sitreps 1 May - 30 Jun 44, sitrep Ops 4397/44, 0645 hrs 7 Jun (for 6 Jun)) (Photostat 981CW (D29))

Richter claims that they had reached the church in Licn-sur-Mer, when strong airlandings forced the battle group to withdraw in order to avoid encirclement (Richter, (Contemporary Report) p. 65). Between 2000 hrs and 2100 hrs the units of 21 Pz Div were pulled back to the general line: "south of Cairon - Cambes - woods north of Lebisay - Orne, as far as I can remember on the order of the Commanding General (so Corps Commander) because of the ever increasing pressure of the enemy" (Ibid, (Narrative) p. 24). Von Criegern's version tends strongly to support the assumption that the Corps Commander ordered the withdrawal. It is interesting to note, in addition, that Corps ascribed the failure of the counter-attack at least in part to German shortcomings:

...At 1500 hrs 12 SS Pz Div was placed under the command of 84 Corps, but the formation was still on the approach-march, and 21 Pz Div's counter-attack would not await their arrival. The Corps Commander ... returned to 21 Pz Div at Caen. At 1620 hrs the counter-attack began. When the General returned in the evening, he reported to the Army that the attack of 21 Pz Div had failed. On the one hand this was due to an enemy airlanding in the rear of the attacking troops, but on the other hand particularly because the attack was not carried out in a concentrated manner by the troops, which had been jumbled together during the earlier engagements east of the Orne. (von Criegern, 84 Corps, op cit, p. 12)

The War Diary of Seventh Army settles the question unequivocally:

...and the Commanding General of 84 Corps gave orders to take up defensive positions... (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Translation, op cit, p. 16)

35. Speidel ascribes the decision to withdraw to Feuchtinger, and criticizes it roundly (Speidel, Invasion 1944, Regnery Co., Chicago, 1950, p. 80). But since the other armoured divisions were bound to appear too late, and no assistance from air and sea could be expected, the commanders concerned may have felt justified in saving the force from being destroyed in vain. It is one thing to criticize a reasonably good division commander, and another one to question the judgment of a corps commander of Marks' distinction. It is well possible that the commanders on the spot had the clearest picture of the situation. Zimmermann saw the matter in a somewhat different light:

...The Division commander thereupon decided to break off the attack in order to rescue the rear elements of the Division. It remains a question whether this decision was the right one. For the situation must doubtless also have been critical for the enemy - locally at least - otherwise he would not have committed airborne forces against a Panzer formation. If, as planned, 12 SS Pz Div had gone into battle along with 21 Pz Div, with Pz Lehr Div echeloned to the rear, at least part of

the beachhead could presumably have been destroyed. Whether or not the enemy would have repeated his landing attempt at this locality is a matter for speculation. After the 21 Pz Div attack failed O.B. West realized that it would no longer be possible to smash the landing....

("A Study in Command", p. 80)

Absence of Major Intervention

36. Contrary to Allied expectations, by the evening of D Day no concerted major attack by a combination of the German armoured formation within striking distance had occurred. According to Speidel:

...Field Marshal Rommel had repeatedly and unsuccessfully asked during the previous month for 1 SS Pz Corps with 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div, intending to place them between Caen and Falaise. He planned to renew his demand to Hitler on 6 Jun. If the Panzer Corps, with the three divisions, had been thrown in immediately, there might have been important local successes at the moment of weakness during the enemy landing.

(Speidel, op cit, p. 81)

Had Rommel prevailed, no doubt a desperate battle would have developed at the coast. But as Allied plans were based on the assumption of early armoured reaction, and more likely than not the German armour would have been destroyed by fire from the air and sea, subsequent Allied waves would have secured a foothold and found little to oppose their progress to the South.

37. A surprising aspect of the German reaction to the events in Normandy was the absence of an immediate stream of detailed orders and snarling exhortations from the Fuehrer. His guidance and interference was soon to become a major factor in the operations in the West, but up to the early hours of the afternoon of 6 Jun, the response of OKW to the developments was so negative as to lend some vestige of credibility to the version advanced by F. von Schlabrendorff:*

...The news was transmitted to the Chief of the Wehrmachtsfuehrungsstab through official channels. There, the duty officer did not dare to awaken General Jodl because of the early hour - with the result that the latter did not hear of the landing until 0900 hrs.

*von Schlabrendorff was a participant in the July plot to eliminate Hitler, and his account must be appraised in this light. He was a staff officer at the Headquarters of Army Group Center in the East, and apparently a frequent visitor at OKW, but he does not state the sources of his information.

Jodl, for his part waited another hour before transmitting the news to Keitel. Both considered themselves obliged to respect the standing order forbidding that Hitler be disturbed while sleeping, and made no move. It was only at the midday conference that Hitler learned of the landing.

This fear of awakening Hitler had serious consequences. For behind the Atlantic Wall there were armoured formations, whose role it was to attack any enemy forces that had landed, and to destroy them.

Hitler had reserved to himself the right to give orders to these formations. Neither Rundstedt* nor Rommel could do so.

When Hitler finally ordered them to attack, it was 1400 hrs, and precious time had been lost.

(von Schlabrendorff, F., "L'attentat du 20 juillet 1944 contre Hitler", translated from French translation in: "HISTORIA", La Revue Vivante du Passé, Paris, No. 49, December 1950, p. 407)

38. Be that as it may, both Zimmermann and Speidel are unanimous in blaming General Jodl for the delay in moving the armour. Zimmermann says:

Between 0630 hrs and 0700 hrs, OKW telephoned O.B. West and objected violently to O.B. West's arbitrary employment of OKW reserves, 12 SS and Pz Lehr Div. [see para 24 above] Both were to be stopped immediately! In spite of all O.B. West's urging, this decision was unobtainable during the morning of 6 Jun 44.

("A Study in Command", p. 75)

And Speidel comments:

It is correct that OKW stopped the reserves. Col Gen Jodl himself gave me the order at the time.

(Ibid)

39. In the early afternoon Field Marshal von Rundstedt was apparently still waiting for OKW to act. When O.Q. West at 1415 hrs asked to be informed of the situation, he was told:

O.B. West's intention is -- after 12 SS Pz Div and 21 Pz Div have been released -- and with additional forces to be moved up -- to clear the landing area with these combined divisions.

(W.D. O.Q. West, op cit, 6 Jun)

*Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt was O.B. West from 8 Mar 42 to 3 Jul 44, and again from 4 Sep 44 to 10 Mar 45. For information on the Marshal see Historical Section (G.S.) Reports Nos 36, 40 and 41.

It was 1500 hrs before Seventh Army was able to record any signs of positive reaction from the High Command. Evidently the Fuehrer was now at the helm and the yes-men were feeding his decisions into the channels of command. At 1230 hrs Speidel had told the Seventh Army the Panzer Corps was not to be committed, but that he would inform O.B. West of the Army's request for 12 SS Pz Div. At 1540 hrs, however, he told Seventh Army the Panzer Corps would be placed under its command, and at 1600 hrs 1 SS Pz Corps was told that 21 Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div, Pz Lehr Div and [the remnants of] 716 Inf Div were to be concentrated at the right wing of 84 Corps and placed under 1 SS Pz Corps. Jodl was demanding that the Calvados area be cleared of the enemy "this very day", and Seventh Army declared this to be impossible. (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl, Vol II, op cit, 6 Jun)

Developments East of the Orne

40. Allied planners could neither count on an eventual German failure to assess the assault as the main effort, nor anticipate the twelve hour paralysis in the proper exercise of the German High Command functions. One of the most important measures designed to delay a quick flow of German armour from the East and Southeast to the area of assault had been the destruction of the principal bridges between Rouen and Paris. Below Rouen the river was tidal, there were no bridges, ferrying operations were difficult. Additional protection for the left flank of British Second Army was to come from 6 Brit Airb Div, which had been dropped to secure certain bridges across the Orne, establish a firm base east of the Orne and prevent the enemy from moving towards the British left flank.

41. The boundary between Seventh and Fifteenth Armies touched the Channel coast at about 2 miles west of Cabourg between the rivers Orne and Dives. West of the boundary was 84 Corps, to the East as far as the Somme was 81 Corps under Gen Pz Tps Adolf Friedrich Kuntzen with headquarters at Rouen. Not much further up the River Seine, with headquarters at Les Andelys, was 116 Pz Div (recently formed from remnants of 16 Pz Gren Div and the personnel of 179 Res Pz Div), some 15 miles further upstream, at La Roche-Guyon, was the headquarters of Army Group B; at St. Germain-en-Laye was O.B. West, and close by was the grand prize, the city of Paris. In the right portion of the Corps sector was Dieppe, a port of little capacity but closer to Paris than any other, in the left portion was Le Havre, somewhat more distant from Paris but ideally suited to receive a large invasion fleet. Invasion in this sector would not have surprised the Germans. At or close to the coast were, from left to right:

south of the Seine: 711 Inf Div

north of the Seine: 17 G.A.F. Div
345 Inf Div
84 Inf Div
245 Inf Div

In the Corps area, but out of reach of the naval guns were:

left: 12 SS Pz Div (south of Lisieux)
center: 116 Pz Div (area of Les Andelys)
right: 2 Pz Div (NW Amiens).

(G.M.D.S. - OKH, Sit Maps West, Sit Map
6 Jun 44) (Photostat 981.004 (D2))

42. 711 Inf Div, commanded by Lt Gen Josef Reichert, was a static coastal division closely resembling 716 Inf Div on its left. Both as to terrain and to operations 711 Inf Div was separated from the Corps' other infantry formations, which, moreover, had been placed so close to the coast as to make lateral moves slow and difficult.* Any assistance required immediately would have to come from 21 Pz Div and/or 12 SS Pz Div. This was the situation when the British forces landed from the air in the Dives - Orne sector.

*Regarding the dispositions of 81 Corps General Kuntzen writes:

Corps Headquarters considered it probable -- that the enemy, in launching an attack, would make an attempt at opening the strongpoints from the rear by means of strong airborne forces. It therefore recommended to man the coast as thinly as possible, to secure it through increased, steady improvements and to retain strong reserves so far to the rear that they would be in a position to destroy landed enemy forces through counter-attack before they would be able to start an attack against the coastal strongpoints from the rear. A Gp B could not concur with this conception. As Field Marshal Rommel expressed himself to the Corps Commander, a large-scale landing in the Corps sector was particularly likely and, therefore, the coast must be manned heavily and the reserves kept as near as possible ("I do not want another Nettuno there").

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-758, Kuntzen 81 Inf Corps during the Preparations against Invasion and during the Invasion until the end of June 1944, p. 4) (German and English Texts: 981SOM. (D128))

... History of war teaches that a superior enemy is almost always successful in river crossings when the defending troops are weak and cannot be in front of the sector. Then the important thing is to destroy the enemy with strong reserve forces after he has crossed, before he can get ready to advance further.

In this situation the Channel could be considered a broad river obstacle. Corps anchored the fixed garrisons close along the coast, regardless of whether there was farther back terrain more favourable and more removed from the enemy naval fire. The reserves subordinated to Corps were fixed when the fighting began.

The proposal which had been repeated for years, namely to focus more on mobile warfare, could not be given consideration because of OKW's instructions.

A report made to General Jodl with regard to this on the occasion of a visit in the first months of 1944 did meet with his concurrence to a certain extent. But he was not able to change the opinion of the highest headquarters. Especially after so much concrete and iron had been laid down directly at the coast...

(Ibid, p. 28)

43. By 0130 hrs 6 Jun the descent of paratroops in the divisional sector had been confirmed (para 8 above). During the early hours of the morning 81 Corps and Fifteenth Army urged repeatedly that 12 SS Pz Div be moved-up. By about 0500 hrs O.B. West had overstepped his authority, placed 12 SS Pz Div under A Gp B and given orders for the formation to move towards Lisieux (para 24 above). During the morning 21 Pz Div received orders to move to the Caen area (para 32 above) and 12 SS Pz Div, still at some distance from the combat zone, was directed to the area west of Caen (para 24 above). Thus the two formations from which 711 Inf Div expected assistance had become unavailable for this purpose, and Corps had to make new arrangements:

The possibility existed of the large-scale fighting spreading to the east bank of the Orne, and 81 Corps, therefore, gave orders to move all reserves of 711 Inf Div - (as far as they were not required to deal with the airlanded forces) - as far west as possible to establish a defensive front. For extensive fighting these forces were too small and the Corps asked Army therefore to move one division from north of the Seine to the left Corps sector. At that time this request could not be met because Army Group was still reckoning with attacks elsewhere, for which the enemy had ample forces available.

(Kuntzen, 81 Corps, op cit, p. 21)

44. The War Diary of Fifteenth Army contains some entries on the measures taken on 6 Jun with regard to the situation east of the Orne:

0645 hrs 81 Corps to AOK 15

Intention: to cross [the Seine] at four different places between Caudebec and Le Havre with four (bicycle-equipped) battalions of 346 Inf Div.

AOK 15 agrees.

0945 hrs Cmdr 711 Inf Div to AOK 15

Area swept clean of paratroops, enemy battalion has bled to death, only 40 prisoners. Between Army boundary and Orne 21 Pz Div engaged in fighting with paratroops.

1105 hrs AOK 7 to AOK 15

Between flooded area at the Army boundary and the Orne Seventh Army has no forces to clear up the situation. Only an Eastern battalion there. 21 Pz Div dealing with the situation west of the Orne. Seventh Army requests commitment of elements 711 Inf Div to clean up area east of the Orne.

AOK 15 to AOK 7

Reserves of 711 Inf Div are of little strength and will come too late. It seems better to commit elements of 12 SS Pz Div. Therefore request declined at 1125 hrs.

1430 hrs AOK 15 to A Gp B

Clearing of bridgehead east of the Orne necessary before the day is out. Commit 12 SS Pz Div. Reply: This has been suggested; permission of OKW expected momentarily.

1440 hrs 81 Corps to AOK 15

Splitting-up 346 Inf Div not desired. Command problems. Crossing of a reinforced regiment takes about six hours. The night would be long enough for this. Will report views of Corps Commander soon.

1445 hrs 81 Corps to AOK 15

Elements 346 Inf Div, viz one regimental headquarters, two battalions, one battery, one engineer company and some flak will cross over to south shore beginning at dark.

2045 hrs 81 Corps to A Gp B

Under commander 857 Gren Regt [346 Inf Div], 2 and 3 bns [857], plus one battery and one engineer company are crossing at dusk at Quillebeuf, Caudebec and Berville, and move to Troarn area via Pont L'Eveque and Dozule. They will be under command 711 Inf Div.... Early on 7 Jun they will advance from Troarn to the area between the Army boundary and the mouth of the Orne to destroy airlanded enemy groups.

(W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 6 Jun)

It will be seen below that this force did not come to grips with Allied troops before mid-afternoon on 7 Jun.

Evening Estimate of the Situation

45. In dealing with the subject of German miscalculations, General Eisenhower wrote:

After the assault had gone in on 6 Jun we continued to maintain, for as long as possible, our concentrations in the south-east and our displays of real and dummy shipping, in the hope that the enemy would estimate that the Normandy beachhead was a diversionary assault and that the main and positive blow would fall on the Pas-de-Calais when the diversion had fulfilled its purpose.

(Report by the Supreme Commander of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force. 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, p. 13)

Right from the beginning, and for weeks thereafter, this is just what the Germans did believe. Appended to the Daily Situation Report West No. 1288 (for 6 Jun 44) of the German Army top level military intelligence section "Foreign Armies West", was the usual "Brief Estimate of the Enemy Situation West", a carefully prepared analysis for very limited

distribution. A full translation of this document appears as Appendix "B" to the present report. Regarding the prospective course of Allied operations the following was said in part:

...This seems to indicate that further operations are being planned and lends strength thereby to the statements in this sense of Churchill and of Eisenhower.

...The whole group of forces of the American First Army Group, which comprises about 25 large formations north and south of the Thames, has not yet been engaged. The same applies to the formations ready for action, about 10 or 12, located in the Central England and Scottish areas. The thought thus lies at hand, that the enemy Command is planning a further large-scale enterprise within the Channel area, which might be directed against a coastal sector in the vicinity of the Channel narrows. It may be expected that, within the scope of this undertaking, the engagement of the strong elements of the Anglo-Saxon Air Force hitherto withheld, will take place presumably in an attempt also to destroy German command headquarters more extensively than heretofore.

(G.M.D.S. - H2/170, OKH, Foreign
Armies West, Daily Sitreps 1944,
6 Jun 44) (981HC (D30))

46. And for once the two German top commanders in the West saw matters much in the same light:

...Despite heaviest commitment in a relatively narrow area, it may be assumed that in all probability this attack is merely a forerunner of other invasion operations.

(O.B. West, Daily Sitreps, op cit,
Sitrep Ops 4397/44, 0645 hrs 7 Jun,
for 6 Jun)

...The estimated strength of the attacking forces is about ten divisions and three to four parachute divisions. A further large-scale undertaking on the Channel coast (smoke screens at Dover) must be reckoned with. Due to complete absence of all air reconnaissance no firm appreciation of enemy operational situation can be made.

(G.M.D.S. - 75803, A Gp B, Daily
Sitreps 6 Jun - 31 Aug 44, 6 Jun 44)
(Photostat 981A Gp B (D1))

47. All German post-war narratives tell a similar story. At the end of D Day the commander of 84 Corps had a fair idea of the true situation:

...There was little hope for successful counter-attacks before the arrival of large reserves. Since General Mareks had his doubts that the High Command would take counter-measures in good time, he considered the invasions as already successful on the evening of 6 Jun.

(von Criegern, 84 Corps, op cit, p. 14)

GERMAN FAILURE TO PREVENT CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD

(7 - 11 JUN)

Command Arrangements and Commanders

48. Prior to the invasion the working staff "Panzer Group West" under the General of Panzer Troops West (von Geyr) had carried out from its headquarters at Paris the task of training the armoured formations and advising O.B. West on all questions of armoured operations.* On 6 Jun O.B. West made Pz Gp West operational and placed it under tactical command of A Gp B (O.B. West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, No. 4397/44, 0645 hrs 7 Jun) (situation on 6 Jun and intentions for 7 Jun). Whilst the headquarters staff of the Panzer Group was moving closer to the front, it was placed under Seventh Army** and made responsible for the area between Orne and Vire with the following formations under command:

1 SS Pz Corps

with

716 Inf Div

352 Inf Div

21 Pz Div

12 SS Pz Div

Pz Lehr Div

and

7 Proj Bde (to come)

The Panzer Group was ordered to take over from 1 SS Pz Corps the task of eliminating the beachhead and regaining the coast. (Ibid, Sitrep 4414/44, 0700 hrs 8 Jun for 7 Jun)

49. On 8 Jun Tac H.Q. Pz Gp West reached Le Pin-au-Haras, 12 km east of Argentan, on 9 Jun it was 17 km north of Flers, on 10 Jun it was at la Caine, 6 km northwest of Thury-Harcourt (O.B. West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 8, 9 and 10 Jun). It is generally accepted that Pz Gp West was in command of the sector on 8 and 9 Jun, and most likely General von Geyr made his influence felt during these days, but officially Pz Gp West did not assume command until 2100 hrs 9 Jun (G.M.D.S. - 57351/7, Seventh Army, W.D. 6 - 30 Jun 44; Appx 47, AOK 7 Ops No. 1273/44, Midday Report 10 Jun). In the afternoon of 10 Jun Marshal Rommel was present at the headquarters of the Panzer Group and discussed the 1 SS Pz Corps attack then being planned for the night 10/11 Jun. In view of the rapid progress of the Allied build-up and the limited German strength available, by evening the plan was dropped (G.M.D.S. - 63181/1, W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Part I, 10 Jun - 8 Aug 44, 10 Jun 44) (Photostat and full Historical Section (G.S.) Translation: 981PA5(D1)).

*See also: H.S. Report No. 40, op cit, paras 11, 26, 74; and: G.M.D.S. - OKH, Personnel Files (Selected Photostats 981HC (D52) Geyr von Schweppenburg)

**Cmdr: Col Gen Friedrich Dollmann (Deceased 28 Jun 44)

During the last 75 minutes of 10 Jun, not long after Rommel's departure, Geyr's headquarters at la Caine came under heavy and prolonged air attacks. General von Geyr was only slightly wounded, but his C. of S., Maj Gen von Dawans, and most of his staff officers were killed, and the signal section destroyed. Early on 11 Jun, therefore, Seventh Army returned the command authority in the sector to 1 SS Pz Corps. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 10 and 11 Jun; O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-466, von Geyr, Pz Gp West, Mid 43 - 5 Jul 44, Transl p. 29).*

50. From 7-11 Jun, therefore, when a co-ordinated counter-thrust with adequate air support might still have had an adverse effect on Allied operations, 1 SS Pz Corps was for all practical purposes in charge of the Caen sector. The exact time at which the Corps assumed control is not known; most secondary sources report the event as having taken place during the night 6/7 Jun, but the decision to place the Corps in charge (pending the arrival of Pz Gp West) was generally known in the afternoon of 6 Jun (para 39 above; W.D. Seventh Army, Appst** Various reports and messages in the afternoon and evening of 6 Jun). Von Criegern writes:

During the night 6/7 Jun, 1 SS Pz Corps assumed command in the Caen sector in order to conduct, after the arrival of 12 SS Pz Div and together with 21 Pz Div the counter-attack west of the Orne River.

(von Criegern, 84 Corps, op cit, p. 14)

51. The Commander of 1 SS Pz Corps was Obergruppenfuehrer und General der Waffen SS, Josef (Sepp) Dietrich. Much is known about this forceful early National Socialist who rose from obscurity to become the commanding officer of Hitler's peace-time bodyguard ("Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler", nucleus of Waffen SS), one of the founders of the Waffen SS (SS Armed Forces) and in succession commander of 1 SS Pz Gren Div "LSAH", 1 SS Pz Corps, Fifth Panzer Army and Sixth SS Panzer Army. Under ordinary circumstances Sepp Dietrich would not have been entitled to the rank of Colonel-General until he commanded an Army, but he seems to have felt himself entitled to this rank as early as 1943; in contemporary documents he is being referred to indiscriminately as either Gruppenfuehrer, Obergruppenfuehrer or Oberstgruppenfuehrer. And who, indeed, would have been there to deny him such a gift, if he desired it? Finally, in the SS Promotion List of 1 Sep 44, his position was regularized by the following entry:

*Additional information is available in various original and secondary sources. Students of the Battle of Normandy will find much of value in General von Geyr's Report. Apart from the original German text and the excellent U.S.A. translation, there is the unedited English version prepared by Geyr, a former German Military Attache in London. His direct style and use of fitting expressions make the report attractive reading. Though frankly controversial, it is of permanent interest.

**These appendices are mostly copies on very flimsy paper and are not suitable for photostatic reproduction.

The Fuehrer has promoted and appointed:

Effective 20 Apr 42

to

SS Oberstgruppenfuehrer und Panzer Generaloberst der Waffen SS

DIETRICH, Josef, SS No.1177, Commander 1 SS Pz Corps
"Leibstandarte"

A Photostatic reproduction of this entry appears as Appendix "C" to the present report (G.M.D.S. - Himmler's Personal Files, Footlocker 15, Part of Item No. 13, SS Personalveraenderungsblatt Issue 1 Sep 44) (Photostat 981SS (D2)). A good deal of information on Dietrich's personality and role in the Campaign in Northwest Europe has been set forth in: (Canadian) Special Interrogation Report, Oberstgruppenfuehrer (Col-Gen) Josef (Sepp) Dietrich (212Cl.3009 (D60)). The Chief of Staff of 1 SS Pz Corps was SS Oberfuehrer Fritz Kraemer, promoted to SS Brigadefuehrer und Generalmajor der Waffen SS on 1 Sep 44, effective date 1 Aug 44 (Personalveraenderungsblatt 1 Sep 44, op cit, p. 3). A list of Waffen SS ranks appears as Appendix "D" to the present report.

General Aspects of Build-up and Fighting

52. When 352 Inf Div was placed under Pz Gp West on 7 Jun (para 48 above), 84 Corps (with 91 Airb Div, 709 Inf Div and 243 Inf Div) was left with the clear-cut task of defending the Cotentin. Early in the morning of 7 Jun Marshal Rommel had pointed to the imperative need for bringing up forces to keep Cherbourg (or the entire Cotentin) from being sealed off by the enemy (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 0850 hrs 7 Jun). At 1010 hrs Seventh Army ordered H.Q. 2 Para Corps (Cmdr: Gen Para Tps Eugen Meindl) from its location at Quintin, southwest of St. Brieuc (Brittany), to the area of Avranches to conduct the defence operations in the southwestern part of the Cotentin. Simultaneously the following (main) forces were placed under 2 Para Corps:

77 Inf Div (to be pulled from coast defence duty in the St. Malo - Dinan sector)

3 Para Div (hitherto Seventh Army Reserve east of Brest)

17 SS Pz Gren Div (hitherto OKW Reserve in Thouars - Loudun area).

(W.D. Seventh Army, Vol II, op cit, 1010 hrs 7 Jun; W.D. Seventh Army, Apps, op cit, fol 16, 7 Jun)

53. Additional orders issued or passed along by Seventh Army between 6 and 11 Jun in connection with the build-up of German forces in Normandy were in the main the following:

6 Jun 265 Inf Div [on coast defence duty in Lorient area], and 275 Inf Div [in formation and training north of Nantes] to despatch one battle group each to St. Lo area and to be under command 84 Corps. (fol 8, 10)

- 8 Jun 5 Para Div [hitherto Seventh Army Reserve in Rennes area] placed directly under 84 Corps. (fol 22)
- 2 Para Corps (with 77 Inf Div and 17 SS Pz Gren Div) to continue forward move without delays and to reach St. Lô area as quickly as possible "as it is important to engage the enemy southwest and west of Bayeux" (fol 24). (On 8 Jun Tac H.Q. 2 Para Corps was at Ducey (SE Avranches). (fol 27))
- 9 Jun 2 Para Corps (less 77 Inf Div, which was being placed under 84 Corps) was ordered to assemble its forces in the area of Balleroy for an intended attack on Bayeux. (fol 37)
- 2 Para Corps informed 2 SS Pz Div "D.R." [hitherto OKW Reserve in Montauban - Toulouse area] to move to area west of Vire as quickly as possible; time of arrival unpredictable.. (folio 35).
- Seventh Army again asked for permission to destroy port of Cherbourg. (fol 41)
- 10 Jun At 1525 hrs Seventh Army relayed to 84 Corps O.B. West's order to destroy all Cherbourg harbour installations not indispensable for German naval operations. (fol 42)
- 25 Corps [H.Q. at Pontivy] was instructed to withdraw 353 Inf Div from coast defence duty in the Brest area and move it up to area southeast St. Lô, "mobile elements ahead, bypassing Avranches, on guard against air attacks, move by night only, but speedy movement required". (folio 58)
- 11 Jun 266 Inf Div [on coast defence duty in Lannion - Guingamp area on north coast of Brittany] to despatch a battle group to area southwest St. Lô, to be under 84 Corps (folio 68)

These various moves were greatly hampered by almost constant interference from the air. (Ibid, passim)

(W.D. Seventh Army, Apps,
op cit, 6 - 11 Jun)

54. The most significant aspect of the foregoing is the absence of any arrangements for the transfer of substantial forces from north of the Seine to Normandy.* True enough, Col Gen Dollmann's hand signed situation reports at the time failed to show definite apprehensions regarding the ability of Seventh Army's forces to cope with the situation (Ibid, 6 - 11 Jun), but the main reason for leaving Fifteenth Army's dispositions relatively undisturbed was the conviction of the highest commanders that a major blow, if not the main blow, was about to be delivered further north, most likely at the Belgian coast. This

* (Rommel had even been reluctant to let 346 Inf Div cross the Seine (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 0920 hrs 7 Jun)).

triumph of Allied deception is fully revealed by many entries in the War Diary of Fifteenth Army. Only fleeting thought was given to transfers from AOK 15 to AOK 7. In a warning message, at 0640 hrs 9 Jun, A Gp B hinted at the possible removal of 84 Inf Div, 2 Pz Div and 1 SS Pz Div, but shortly afterwards, beginning at 0855 hrs, Fifteenth Army was alerted to "Threatening Danger", and later in the day this was converted to Alert II, the highest degree of Alert (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 9 Jun). OKW was said to have definite information regarding an Allied assault on the Belgian coast in the morning of 10 Jun (Ibid, A Gp B to AOK 15, 1255 hrs 9 Jun), and Hitler had made Rommel personally responsible for the absolute readiness of every man in his command (Ibid, 10 Jun, Tel cons C. of S. A Gp B with C. of S. AOK 15, 1700 hrs and 1820 hrs 10 Jun). Nothing further was heard about transfers from the Army area; to the contrary, on 11 Jun Fifteenth Army was advised of the forthcoming arrival of additional divisions. (Ibid, 11 Jun)

55. The fact that friend and foe alike were fighting bravely and to the best of their abilities emerges from the absence of critical remarks in the German documents. But all German situation reports for the period were filled with references to breaks in signal communications, blown bridges, complications, delays and casualties caused by the unchecked Allied air attacks (Sitreps O.B. West, A Gp B, Seventh Army, passim). For years the Germans had been speaking of massive counter-attacks to throw a landed enemy back into the sea, but in the event the build-up was too slow, the Allies never lost the initiative and by the morning of 11 Jun O.B. West reported to the High Command:

Seventh Army everywhere forced on defensive. Enemy air activity has greatly hindered movements on the battle field and up to far into the rear the bringing up of reinforcements.

(O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, Ops No. 4487/44, Sitrep 0715 hrs 11 Jun)

Authentic information on the positions and dispositions of Seventh Army for every day from 6 - 30 Jun 44 is available in the form of a series of large reproduced situation maps. (G.M.D.S. - 57351/11, W.D. Seventh Army, Sit Maps 6 - 30 Jun 44) (Photostats 981A7 (D3a-z))

12 SS Pz Div "Hitlerjugend"

56. The main opposition to the Canadian southward drive from the coastal rim was furnished by 12 SS Pz Div "Hitlerjugend". While many other German divisions will be remembered with the respect accorded a worthy and defeated foe, the name of 12 SS Pz Div stands forever sullied by the murders committed by its young savages on defenceless captured Canadians.* When the

*Detailed information on this subject will be found assembled in: "Supplementary Report of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force Court of Inquiry re Shooting of Allied Prisoners of War by 12 SS Panzer Division (Hitler-Jugend) in Normandy, France 7 - 21 June 1944." (H.S. 20531.023 (D9)SHAEP), (thereafter referred to as "SHAEP Report")

Division launched its counter-attacks against the Canadians, it was overstrength, well equipped, well trained and a typical product of the Nazi ideology applied to the military sphere. The officers were either ardent Nazis who had shown military prowess in Russia, or professional army officers not devoid of some affinity to the Nazi way of doing things. In part at least the NCOs were selected young veterans of the war of extermination as practiced in the East; the rank and file were largely recent conscripts, fruits of the brutalizing ideology under which they were born and failed to reach maturity in years and spirit. The extreme youthfulness of the Division's personnel was strikingly illustrated by a captured nominal roll of 1 Bn 25 SS Pz Gren Regt. According to the birthdays listed on the document, in July 1944 the composition of this unit by age groups (all ranks) was:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
18	65
19	17
20-25	15
25-30	1.5
over 30	1.5

(First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary No. 46, 14 Aug 44, Part II, p. 8; H.S. 215C1.023)

57. The organization of a name division "Hitlerjugend" had been under consideration from February to April 1943. From the incomplete pertinent documentation in Himmler's personal files the impression is gained that the original proponents of the idea were sycophants mainly interested in creating the division as a means of courting favour and, if all went well, obtaining the appointment of divisional commander. There must have been keen disappointment in some quarters when a combat officer was placed in command and the hopefuls were told their services were required "for more important tasks" (G.M.D.S. - Himmler's Personal Files. Footlocker 17, from Item 16, passim) (Photostat 981SSPz D12 (D1)). However that may have been, by June 1943 much preliminary work had been done, and on 24 Jun the SS Main Operational Department (SS-Führungshauptamt) issued the first executive order and table of organization for "an SS Pz Gren Div 'Hitlerjugend'" (Ibid, 24 Jun). Referring to a Fuehrer order to this effect, the introductory paragraph announced the immediate formation of such a division at the Troops Training Ground Beverloo (north of Brussels). In October 1943, in connection with the expansion of the SS forces then under way, Hitler ordered the conversion of the formation from a Panzer Grenadier Division to a Panzer Division (Ibid, 21 Oct). A reproduction and translation of this handsigned order of the Fuehrer appears as Appendix "E" to the present report. The pertinent executive order and the new table of organization were issued by the SS Hauptfuehrungsamt on 30 Oct. (Ibid)

58. The number of original contemporary Waffen SS documents in the hands of G.M.D.S. is quite limited. One of the available documents is a roster of the names and appointments of the Waffen SS formations' senior officers on 31 Jul 43 (Himmler Files, op cit, Footlocker 49, from Item 12) (Photostat 981SS(D1)). According to this list even then (and presumably since its formation) 12 SS Pz Div was

under the command of Oberführer (Senior Colonel), later Brigadeführer (Major General) Fritz Witt. He led the Division in the early fighting in Normandy until 10 Jun*, when he was killed and succeeded by Obersturmbannführer (subsequently Standartenführer, and later Brigadeführer) Kurt Meyer (10 Jun - 7 Sep 44). Nominally since its formation, and actually since August 1943, Meyer had been in command of the Division's 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. He is the officer who has been found guilty of failing in his duty to see that provisions of the Geneva Convention were observed by all ranks under his command.

59. The Division comprised the following combattant units:

12th SS Panzer Regiment
25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment
26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment
12th SS Reconnaissance Battalion
12th SS Panzer Artillery Regiment
12th SS Anti Tank Battalion
12th SS Panzer Engineer Battalion
12th SS Panzer Signals Battalion
12th SS Anti Aircraft (Flak) Battalion
12th SS Divisional Escort Company

Detailed information on the Division's composition, strength and equipment as on 1 Jun 44 was contained in the monthly Condition Report submitted by the Division at that time to the Inspector General of Panzer Troops** (G.M.D.S. - H15/50, Insp Gen of Pz Tps, Condition Reports of SS Pz Formations, 12 SS Pz Div, 1 Jun 44)(Selected Photostats: 981HC(D51)). According to this report the personnel situation of the Division on the key-date was as follows:

	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>Over</u>	<u>Under</u>
Offrs	664	-	144
NCOs	4 575	-	2 192
ORs	15 277	2 360	-
	20 516	2 360	2 336

With 20,516 all ranks, the division was 24 men overstrength. In addition there were 216 Hiwis*** (887 less than authorized). The Division was classified: "Fit for Attack"; C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps (Kraemer) added: "With the exception of the Projector and Anti-Tank units the Division is fit for any task in the West". (Ibid)

*This according to Meyer's testimony (SHAEP Report, op cit, Exhibit 8, pp. 3-4). It is possible that Meyer erred in his calculation by a day or two, for Seventh Army and the next higher echelons did not hear of Witt's death until 14 Jun (all sitreps, passim). But the actual date of his death was not mentioned, and it must be taken into consideration that signal communications at the time were in a state of chaos, H.Q. Pz Gp West had been destroyed and H.Q. 1 SS Pz Corps bombarded.

**Guderian, Heinz Wilhelm, Col-Gen, Inspector General of Panzer Troops.

***Non-combattant auxiliary volunteers.

60. With regard to tanks the Division was not yet up to strength:

<u>Tanks</u>					
Mark	III	IV	V	VI	TOTAL
Authorized	4	101	81	-	186
Ready	2	91	48	-	141
Quick Repair	-	7	2	-	9
Total on hand	2	98	50	-	150

In addition there were:

Miscellaneous armoured vehicles	333
Self-propelled Anti Tank Guns	13
Motor Cycles	952
Motor cars	approx 900
Miscellaneous trucks (& trailers)	approx 1800
Prime mover trucks	approx 100
Heavy Anti Tank Guns	28
Misc Artillery pieces	52
Light Infantry Guns	27
etc.	

(For further details see: Ibid, Photostat 981HC (D51))

61. The third page of this Condition Report was the usual "Order of Battle Sheet". An enlarged reproduction and a translation appear as Appendix "F" to the present report. Apart from supplying information on 12 SS Pz Div, the Appendix shows the German method of conveying a mass of organizational data on small sheets easy to amend or replace.

Fighting in the Canadian Sector

62. Contemporary documentation from Corps and lower levels for this phase is not available, and the situation reports of higher headquarters carried little detail. To answer some legitimate questions it has been necessary, therefore, to use a number of statements made under oath at the Meyer trial (SHAFF Report, op cit), and some information supplied by Capt Bernhard-Georg Meitzell in his narrative "Caen-Falaise" (Canadian Army Journal, Vol 4, Nos 1 and 2, April and May 1950). In June 1944 Meitzell was on the headquarters staff of 12 SS Pz Div.

7 Jun

63. In the afternoon of 7 Jun the Canadian advance inland was checked at Authie and Buron. According to Meyer's positive statement, Authie and Buron were retaken by armoured elements, and the infantry then moved forward and occupied a line between those villages (SHAFF Report, op cit, Exhibit 8, p. 28). The infantry was 3 Bn 25 SS Pz Gren Regt*, the armour was the "Prinz" (name of Cmdr)

*C.O.: Sturmabführer Karl Heinz Milius (later killed)
(SHAFF Report, op cit, Exhibit 27)

battalion of the Tank Regiment (loc cit). At the time in question Meyer was not yet in command of the Division, and at the interrogation he was not quite certain whether the "Prinz" unit was the First or the Second Battalion, but he thought it was the First (Ibid).^{*} Lt Gen Feuchtinger, in command of neighbouring 21 Pz Div at the time of the event, said later, on the occasion of a special interrogation on 25 Aug 45, that the attack in question had been carried out by the Panther Battalion of 12 SS Pz Div (Special Interrogation Reports, op cit, Feuchtinger; H.S. 212Cl.3009 (D60)). The Panther Battalion was definitely 1 Bn 12 SS Pz Regt (See Appx "F" to present report). It was at Authie and Buron that the Division began compiling its record of evil deeds against Canadians.

64. Due to casualties and delays from air attacks it had not been possible on 7 Jun to commit 12 SS Pz Div as a compact force.^{**} By 0957 the leading elements had reached the area SW Caen - Villers-Bocage (W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, Vol III of Apps, folio 12), and were held up there by very strong air attacks. At the same time the point of Pz Lehr Div had reached the Thury-Harcourt area (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 1200 hrs 7 Jun). But positions north and northwest of Caen were taken up only later in the day and during the night 7/8 Jun. The local successes obtained on 7 Jun had fallen far short of clearing the bridgehead, and in the first report despatched on 8 Jun, either ill-informed or using euphemistic language, Seventh Army explained:

Owing to heavy casualties on the march and waves of air attacks the assembly and attack of 12 SS Pz Div in the designated area could not be carried out at the appointed time. Attack only feasible on 8 Jun. Div has orders to assemble all elements as quickly as possible, and attack in the morning of 8 Jun. AOK 7 Ops

(W.D. Seventh Army, Apps, op cit, fol 20)

But the final and formal Situation Report (Tagesmeldung) of A Gp B for 7 Jun read as follows:

At 1700 hrs, I SS Pz Corps, with 21 Pz Div and 12 SS Pz Div, advancing from north and northwest of Caen, launched the attack aimed at reaching the coast, fighting late in the evening with enemy armour in the heights of Douvres. Moving up Pz Lehr Div proved very difficult and slow as a result of enemy air superiority, hence the Division could not be committed....

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 7 Jun)

^{*}C.O.: Sturmbannfuhrer Prinz (later killed) (SHAEF Report, op cit, Exhibit 27)

^{**}Cmdr 12 SS Pz Div reached 716 Inf Div H.Q. before 0400 hrs 7 Jun and said [verbatim]:

I have been on the way to you for eight hours, and four of these I had to spend in the ditch because of air attacks. The marching columns of the Division are suffering bad casualties in men and material....

(Richter, (Narrative), op cit, p. 25)

8 - 11 Jun

65. By 8 Jun most of the German radio sections in the sector had been eliminated by fire from the air or sea. (O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, Sitrep, No. 4437/44, 0700 hrs 9 Jun, for 8 Jun). Because radio communications between Seventh Army and 1 SS Pz Corps were disrupted, the Army Commander went personally to Tac H.Q. 1 SS Pz Corps. By midday the attack by 1 SS Pz Corps had not yet begun (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol 1, 8 Jun, p. 12). During the day 26 SS Pz Gren Regt reached the area La Villeneuve - Fontenay-le-Pesnel and made an attempt to dislodge the Canadians along the Caen - Bayeux road by attacking toward the North and Northwest. According to Meitzell (op cit), 1 Bn 26 SS Pz Gren Regt came too late to prevent the loss of Rots and Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse, where elements of the Panzer Regiment had suffered severe casualties. 2 Bn 26 SS Pz Gren Regt attacked Putot-en-Bessin, took it and lost it again. Meyer's statements and markings on a map (SHAEP Report, op cit, Exh 8) seem to support Meitzell's version, but in the absence of direct proof a definite statement regarding the identity of the units concerned cannot be made.

66. No detailed information from German sources is on hand for the events in the Canadian sector from 9 - 11 Jun. But obviously the stout Canadian resistance thwarted 12 SS Pz Div's high hopes of regaining the coast. On the evening of 9 Jun, A Gp B still expected 1 SS Pz Corps to advance northwards, then to veer off to the West and take the town of Bayeux. But the resistance encountered, the linking of the beachheads through the Allied capture of Port-en-Bessin on 10 Jun, and an Allied armoured breakthrough northeast of Tilly on the same day, showed clearly that the Allied consolidation had progressed to the point where it could no longer be defeated with the forces within reach. A Gp B recorded the necessity of abandoning the attack planned for the night 10/11 Jun (see para 49 above), and on 11 Jun the Army Group recorded merely 1 SS Pz Corps had succeeded in repulsing several armoured attacks (with 40-50 tanks each) on its centre and left wing. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, Sitreps 9 - 11 Jun for sit 8 Jun). Identification of 3 Cdn Inf Div near St. Aubin was carried in the 8 Jun Situation Report of 'Foreign Armies West.' A Cdn Army Tank Bde was mentioned on 9 Jun; it was not certain whether it was 2 or 3 Bde (Foreign Armies West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 8 and 9 Jun).

Fighting in Dives - Orne Sector

67. During the night 6/7 Jun reinforced 2 and 3 Bns 857 Gren Regt (346 Inf Div) were to cross the Seine to accomplish on 7 Jun, in conjunction with forces already in the sector, the destruction of the airlanded enemy between the Orne and the Army boundary (para 44 above). The positions and movements of the German forces in the sector were recorded by Fifteenth Army on a series of daily situation maps. Reproductions of these maps are being retained by Historical Section (G.S.). (G.M.D.S. - 59364/13, W.D. Fifteenth Army, Sit Maps Dives - Orne Sector, 7 - 16 Jun 44)(Photostats: 981A15 (D10a-m)).

7 Jun

68. The rear elements of Group 857 crossed the Seine at 0430 hrs 7 Jun. They were supposed to reach Varaville between 0800 and 0900 hrs. At what time and under what conditions they took Varaville has not been recorded; it is known, however, that they debouched from that locality not earlier than at 1800 hrs. During the morning General Speidel had concurred with Fifteenth Army's request for permission to move in the balance of 346 Inf Div. Preparations were halted for a short time when Marshal Rommel disagreed with this and expressed concern regarding possible Allied airborne landings in the resulting gap. But Rommel reconsidered, and Speidel instructed the Army to go ahead with the preparations. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 7 Jun)

69. From Varaville the German forces fanned out as follows:

2 and 3 Bn 744 Gren Regt (711 Inf Div) moved towards Merville;

2 Bn 857 had reached the area of le Bas de Bréville by 1900 hrs and was approaching Sallenelles at 2330 hrs.

3 Bn 857 reached Bavent at 1900 hrs and was moving from Bavent towards Bréville at 2330 hrs.

(Sit Maps Dives - Orne Sector op cit, 7 Jun)

70. On reaching Bavent at 1900 hrs, 3 Bn 857 relieved there the encircled Bn H.Q. and 40 men of an East Bn.* According to the situation map, a few kilometres southwest of Bavent, near Escoville, was an advance detachment of 21 Pz Div. In Bavent the relieving force found a Lieutenant of 21 Pz Recce Bn. He said his men had installed themselves near Escoville for "hedgehog defence". When asked "Against whom?", he answered: "There is not much going on". --After relieving Bavent, 3 Bn 857 continued towards Bréville and shortly before midnight encountered bitter resistance about one mile southeast of Bréville (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 7 Jun). At the end of the day the allotted task of clearing the sector had not been accomplished; whether it could be done at all was problematical.

8 Jun

71. At 1015 hrs the attack on Sallenelles by 2 Bn 857 was making progress but Bréville seemed to be strongly held, and the attack on the locality by 3 Bn 857 had not yet started. At the same time [642] East Bn was screening Bavent against attacks from the Bois de Bavent; the bulk of 21 Pz Recce Bn was in the Touffreville area under orders to advance on Ranville. At 1230 hrs two Pz Gren Coys and one Engr Coy of 21 Pz Div were in Troarn.

*This was H.Q. 642 East Bn, a remnant of the extreme right wing of 736 Gren Regt, 716 Inf Div. (H.S. Report No. 41, op cit, Apps "C" and "G")

East of Touffreville elements of the Recce Bn repulsed an attack from the Bois de Bavent, another part of the Recce Bn was on Hill 35 (Butte de la Hogue), set to repulse any attacks from the direction of Escoville. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 8 Jun)

72. Further west, in the area of Ste. Honorine, was Group Luck composed of one Pz Gren Bn, one Pz Gren Coy, one Tank Coy and one Assault Gun Coy, all of 21 Pz Div. This force carried out four unsuccessful attacks on the Line Longueval - Carro (1½ km E Longueval).^{*} The Allied airlanded forces were maintaining a strong bridgehead at Ranville; they were being strengthened steadily by reinforcements moving in over the bridge at Benouville. The German Corps Commander asked A Gp B directly for an air strike on the bridge, but he was told that the aircraft required for this very desirable undertaking were committed elsewhere and not available at the moment (Ibid, 8 Jun). Thus it became possible for the Allies to enjoy the full benefits of capturing the bridges undamaged.

73. According to A Gp B's Final Situation Report (Tagesmeldung) for 8 Jun, the German forces fighting in the Dives - Orne sector were placed under Fifteenth Army on that day (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 8 Jun). The German situation map for 8 Jun shows clearly the failure of the advance attempted by 3 Bn 857 in the direction of Le Mesnil. The battalion was forced back during the morning to the starting line Chateau Chefderne - le Plain; this was the result of an attack on the battalion's deep left flank. A short distance further north the Germans were more successful. In the afternoon 2 Bn 858 Gren Regt (the first bn of this regt to intervene) moved towards Bréville; by 2200 hrs it had taken the major portion of the locality. Further north again, 2 Bn 857 was making progress in the fight for Sallenelles, 3 Bn 744 was mopping up southwest and west of Merville, 2 Bn 744 was at Franceville-Plage. In the southernmost part of the fighting area 21 Pz Recce Bn contained the Allied forces but was unable to make headway towards Ranville. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 8 Jun)

9 Jun

74. On this day Fifteenth Army was primarily interested in last minute preparations for the Allied major assault expected to hit the Belgian coast on 10 Jun (para 54 above). The few relevant entries indicate that the German forces in the sector gained some ground, but that the Ranville bridgehead remained unshaken. At 1300 hrs Lt Gen Erich Diestel (Cmdr 346 Inf Div) assumed command of all German forces in the sector. He reported immediately that his infantry was being slowed down by the inundations; weapons were not coming up as fast as expected; the attack would have to be postponed until 10 Jun (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 9 Jun). According to the situation map, 21 Pz Recce Bn had taken Escoville, and in the evening 2 Bn 858 was approaching Ranville on the road from Bréville. The area from Sallenelles to the sea had been cleared of Allied elements. (Sit Maps Dives - Orne Sector, op cit, Sit Maps 9 Jun)

^{*}Conversely, at the same time and place, 1 Bn Royal Ulster Rifles of 6 Airb Div's Airl'd Bde found it impossible to advance southwards from the Longueval area. (HS 255B6.013 (D1) 6 Airb Div, Ops in Normandy)

10 Jun

75. What was expected to develop into a concentric attack on Ranville from the North, East and South, went under way at 0830 hrs. But German hopes for quick success began to fade when sharp counter-thrusts developed from some Allied pockets of resistance. Attempting to move south from Sallenelles, 2 Bn 857 was thrown back by determined resistance north of Chateau d'Amfreville; from the same locality pressure was brought to bear against the deep flank of 2 and 3 Bns 858, moving towards Ranville. Further harassment came from a resistance pocket at Chateau de Bréville. At 1700 hrs Corps reported the presence of Allied artillery on the east bank of the Orne; obviously the resistance nests had to be eliminated before Ranville could be tackled. Additional trouble was encountered in the area of Le Marquet; at 1900 hrs 346 Assault Gun Bn was reported to have disabled 8 of 15 tanks which had attacked from that locality. This signified the days attack had failed. During the night's telephone conversations, General Kuntzen, in lieu of air support was offered free advice. He said he would go to the front in person, but the troops had to be sorted out first and the attack could not be resumed before the afternoon of 11 Jun. During the day Bavent and the artillery positions east thereof had come under heavy fire from naval guns; many signs pointed to a forthcoming breakout from the bridgehead towards Bavent. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 10 Jun and night 10/11 Jun)

11 Jun

76. Mainly due to a command imbroglio the German situation in the sector deteriorated on 11 Jun. All forces fighting in the Dives - Orne sector were under command of Fifteenth Army (para 72 above); but 21 Pz Div, hard pressed on the west bank of the Orne, gave unauthorized orders in the morning for all its units east of the Orne (except 21 Pz Recce Bn) to move forthwith to the west bank. By the time A Gp B had straightened out the matter and given orders to re-occupy positions already given up, the opponent had taken full advantage of the opportunity and expanded the southern arc of the bridgehead to and past the localities of Herouvilllette, Escoville, Touffreville and Sannerville. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 11 Jun; Sit maps Dives - Orne Sector, op cit, sit map 11 Jun)

Estimates of the General Situation

7 Jun

77. At C.-in-C. Navy's situation conference at 1800 hrs 7 Jun, Hitler and Rommel were said to regard the invasion situation in a positive and confident manner; they were expecting the counter-measures to succeed (W.D. Skl, op cit, 7 Jun, p. 141).* The appraisal of the situation by the Naval Operations Staff was more guarded; the difficulties to be overcome were listed and the outcome was described as hanging in the balance (Ibid, p. 157). 'Foreign Armies West' pointed to intelligence reports predicting further major landings. (Foreign Armies West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, Sitrep No. 1289, 7 Jun 44)

*C.-in-C. Navy: Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz

8 Jun

78. The situation reports of O.B. West and A Gp B carried no appraisals of the general situation. The Naval Operations Staff considered the situation as unpromising (W.D. Skl, op cit, 8 Jun, p. 189); Naval Group West regarded it as serious. Over the signature of Admiral Krancke, the following was entered:

...Since now for two days there has been no tangible success for our side, the time most favourable for the defence has slipped away. The situation must be considered as grave....

(W.D. Naval Gp West, op cit, p. 6267, 8 Jun)

'Foreign Armies West' kept harping on the subject of further major landings:

...The fact that even now none of the forces held ready in SE and E England have been identified on the landing front, lends strength to the presumption that these substantial forces are being held together for further plans in other areas. Pointing in the same direction are the noticeable retention [in reserve] - (according to the Air Operations Staff (Lw F St)) - of the British close fighter formations, British reconnaissance orders denoting interest in the German defence preparations in the Liege - Vise - Maastricht sector, and enemy radio warnings to the fishermen of Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium to give up fishing immediately and return to their harbours.

('Foreign Armies West', op cit, Sitrep No. 1290, 8 Jun, Appx "Brief Estimate of Enemy Situation")

9 Jun

79. Skl noted the German formations had been forced on the defensive, the bridgeheads had been unified, the enemy build-up was proceeding faster than their own, it was logical to reckon with the establishment of the second front (Skl, op cit, 9 Jun, pp 211-212). Foreign Armies West predicted an early Allied drive to seal off the Cotentin; the Allied group of forces in southeastern England was still intact and ready for major operations ('Foreign Armies West', Sitreps, op cit, 9 Jun). Naval Group West recorded O.B. West's certain expectation of a major landing at the Belgian coast on 10 Jun; Admiral Krancke added to this:

"After weighing the over-all situation I am unable to share this belief."

(W.D. Naval Group West, op cit, p. 6278, 9 Jun)

10 Jun

80. At C.-in-C. Navy's situation conference at 1800 hrs (closest circle), it was stated flatly: "The invasion had succeeded; the Second Front has been established" (W.D. Skl, op cit, 10 Jun, p. 244). 'Foreign Armies West' noted that about half of the 21st Army Group

had been committed in Normandy, the other half was likely to be committed there too. The intact group of forces in southeastern England was said to be composed of approximately 27 large formations, to which another five Divisions from the Midlands and three from Scotland might be added ('Foreign Armies West', Sitreps, op cit, 10 Jun). O.B. West's situation report of 0715 hrs 11 Jun (sit 10 Jun) closed with the remark:

...O.B. West expects new heavy enemy attacks, probably on the Channel front. All necessary and possible preparations have been made. On orders of O.B. West the alert state "Threatening Danger" has been advanced to day and night alert in all areas and as far back as the German border....

(O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, Sitrep Ops No. 4487/44, 0715 hrs 11 Jun)

11 Jun

81. On this day Rommel prepared for despatch to Keitel and submission to Hitler a situation report setting forth in some detail the difficulties to be faced in Normandy. A transfer of troops from Fifteenth Army to Normandy was not mentioned, but the document was almost certainly meant to supplement Rundstedt's bland reports and to re-direct and concentrate attention on events in Normandy. Marshal von Rundstedt, Rommel's direct superior, was to receive a copy "after despatch". (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, Rommel's personal Situation Report of 12 Jun for 11 Jun) (Photostat and Translation: 981AGpB (D1), 12 Jun)

THE STRUGGLE FOR CAEN (12 JUN - 9 JUL) GERMAN STRENGTH ATTRACTED TO EAST WING

82. By the end of June the American First Army had captured Cherbourg and the British Second Army was facing a German major concentration in the Caen sector. In June and July the operations of the two German Armies were not as closely interlocked as they were to be during the last phases of the Battle in Normandy. For this reason the discussion of the events in June and July is confined in the present report to a brief account of the German measures in the eastern portion of the bridgehead.

Hitler demands Elimination of Allied Bridgehead East of Orne (12 Jun)

12 Jun

83. Apart from the Germans closing a gap between 1 SS Pz Corps and 2 Para Corps in the Caumont area, the day's fighting in the eastern part of the Normandy bridgehead was of relatively little significance. Important, however, were certain decisions made at the highest German command levels:

On 12 Jun the Fuehrer gave orders to attack and eliminate the enemy bridgehead between Orne and Vire piece by piece. First

of all the enemy east of the Orne was to be destroyed, so that 346 Inf Div would become available again....

(Schramm*, Der Westen, p. 40)(981SOM(D102))

At the same time O.B. West was informed that 2 SS Pz Corps with 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs was going to be placed at his disposal....

(Ibid)

2 SS Pz Corps ordered to France (12 Jun)

84. At the end of March 1944, at the very time when the Allied invasion preparations were judged to be virtually complete, the German High Command had found it necessary to weaken the Western defences by rushing 2 SS Pz Corps to the East (H.S. Report No. 40, op cit, para 53). The Corps was committed for a short period in the Tarnopol area, but when the invasion of Normandy began it was inactive near Lemberg in the Reserve of Army Group "Nordukraine" (Northern Ukraine) (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MG B-747, 2 SS Pz Corps, 29 Jun - 24 Jul 44, p. 1)(981SOM(D125)). On the Order of Battle of the German Army for 15 Jun 44 the Corps was still shown with Army Group Northern Ukraine, but at the time it must have been almost ready for the hurried return trip to the West (G.M.D.S. - OKH, Periodical Schematic Orders of Battle of the German Army, 1944, (Photostat 981.045 (D1))). According to Schramm it was on 11 Jun that Hitler decided to desist from a planned attack in the Kovel area and to return 2 SS Pz Corps to the West (Schramm, Der Westen, op cit, p. 37). But the actual order was issued on 12 Jun, when Panzer Group West received the following signal:

O.B. West (A Gp D) Ops No. 4530/44, 12 Jun 44

According to OKH/Genst d H/ Ops No. 440321/44, dated 12 Jun 44, Corps Headquarters 2 SS Pz Corps, with 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs, is being transferred to Army Group D immediately at top speed.

Minute by O.B. West:

On arrival to be under A Gp B.

(G.M.D.S.-63181/4, W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps 10 Jun - 8 Aug 44, 12 Jun 44) (Photostat 981PA5 (D4))

*Schramm, Der Westen: This draft War Diary (KTB) is based on the detailed daily working notes kept by Major Schramm in his capacity as historian at the headquarters of OKW. Until the end of 1943 the Diary was arranged purely chronologically, supplemented by information from participants in operations. After 1943 the Diary was arranged according to subject matter and fronts (Ausarbeitungen), for example, the Anzio Beachhead, Shifting of divisions between fronts, and so forth, and was supplemented by a Merkbuch kept by Schramm, with notes of the discussions at the situation meetings he attended and notes obtained from special interviews with the Deputy Chief of WFSt, General Warlimont. From 1 January 1945 the chronological order was reintroduced. In view of the subsequent destruction of the OKW records ordered by General Scherff, the copies of the Ausarbeitungen for 1944 and the personal commentaries preserved by Schramm represent a unique and valuable source. (H.M. Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, U.S. Army in World War II, European Theatre of Operations)

85. Since the German High Command at that time was unwilling to weaken Fifteenth Army, any large, high-grade fighting formations to be brought in would have to come from the East. 2 SS Pz Corps was the logical choice; under the higher direction of General von Geyr the Corps had been trained with special care, it was under an able corps commander, it was inactive. That the Corps was not alerted sooner for transfer to the West was a grave mistake, for in the event the formation reached Normandy too late for an effective attack and was frittered away piecemeal in defensive fighting.

86. The commander of 2 SS Pz Corps (then and until he assumed command of Seventh Army on 29 Jun) was SS Obergruppenfuehrer und General der Waffen SS Paul Hausser*, **. Commander of 9 SS Pz Div ("Hohenstaufen") (then and until he replaced Hausser in command of 2 SS Pz Corps on 29 Jun) was SS Gruppenfuehrer und Generalleutnant der Waffen SS Willi Bittrich***. 10 SS Pz Div ("Frundsberg") was under Standartenfuehrer [or Brigadefuehrer] Heinz Harmel.

87. A further step towards strengthening the forces in Normandy was Hitler's decision on 12 Jun to move 1 SS Pz Div (Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler; indiscriminately abbreviated "LSAH" or "LS3AH") to 1 SS Pz Corps "in the near future". (G.M.D.S. - OKW/1760, Jodl, Diary Notes, p. 29, 12 Jun 44) (981HC(D50)). At that time 1 SS Pz Div was located in the Turnhout - Beverloo area east of Antwerp, the divisional commander was SS Brigadefuehrer Theodor Wisch.

German Group East of Orne exhausted -
Expectancy of Second Landing precludes
Depletion of Fifteenth Army

88. In the fighting east of the Orne the situation of Battle Group Luck had deteriorated on 11 Jun (para 76 above). With Luck's forces in danger of being overwhelmed, Fifteenth Army now thought of moving 84 Inf Div from the Dieppe - Rouen - St. Valerie triangle to the area south of the Seine and south-east of Caen (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, p. 140, 12 Jun). But in a telephone conversation with the Army commander, at 1320 hrs, Marshal Rommel refused to agree with this suggestion; he said an enemy push east of the Orne was unlikely; he felt more concern regarding possible developments astride the Somme; there was no danger at the moment to Le Havre; air landing forces ought rather be moved to the mouth of the Somme (Ibid, p. 142). At 1940 hrs Fifteenth Army received the Fuehrer's order giving first priority to the elimination of the enemy from the Dives - Orne sector. 81 Corps reported

*Erroneously spelled with one s in some German documents

**Hausser was an able professional officer. In 1932 he retired from the Reichswehr with the rank of Lt-Gen. Subsequently he played a big part in the creation of the Waffen SS, and distinguished himself at Charkow and Belgorod. (For further details see: SHAEF, Weekly Int Sum No. 17, 15 Jul 44, pp.13 and 14)

***Bittrich's first name was Willi, not Wilhelm as indicated by German diarists who regarded "Willi" as lacking in dignity. In the SS Promotion List of 1 Sep 44, op cit, p. 3, the following appeared:

Effective 1 Aug 44: [Promoted to]:
SS-Obergruppenfuehrer und General der Waffen-SS:

Bittrich, Willi, SS Nr. 39177,

Kommandierender General II. SS Pz. Korps

it could not do this without first receiving additional infantry forces; Fifteenth Army repeated it could not spare any infantry; 81 Corps reported the infantry elements of Group Luck had shrunk to 420 men and consisted of:

2 Bn 125 Regt (now 200 men)
Recco Bn (150 men)
Engr Coy (60 men)
and
one assault gun battalion (15 lt fld hows S.P.)
one assault gun battalion (10 or 12 7.5 cm S.P.)
one flak company (2cm)
one tank company (9 Mark IV tanks)

(Ibid, p. 144)

When Fifteenth Army reported this situation, General Speidel replied that moving-in 84 Inf Div or additional elements of 21 Pz Div was out of the question, and that Marshal Rommel would have to examine the request for an airlanding regiment before a decision could be made in that matter. (Ibid, p. 144)

13 Jun

89. There were no major developments in the Caen sector on that day. The Germans had identified 2 Cdn Armd Bde northwest of Caen; 2 Cdn Inf Div was believed to have remained in the Dover area ("Foreign Armies West", Sitreps, op cit, 13 and 14 Jun). Warning was given of the tidal conditions in the Somme-Seine area during the days around 19 Jun favouring new enemy landings. (Ibid, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, No. 1295, 13 Jun)

90. East of the Orne Allied pressure increased. During the early hours of the morning Bréville, Sannerville and Ste. Honorine were lost. Group Luck was exhausted, 346 Inf Div was unable to lend support, Army Group was informed of the urgent need for fresh forces. 81 Corps suggested falling back to the east bank of the Dives, the Army commander said this was out of the question. 7 Proj Bde (supposedly en route to 346 Inf Div) had not been heard from. It was located west of the Orne, immobilized by lack of fuel. By 1840 hrs the "lack of fuel" story had been explained in the sense that 1 SS Pz Corps wanted to keep the Brigade, but Army Group B gave orders for the formation to proceed at once to 81 Corps. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 13 Jun)

14 Jun

91. Pressure on the inner wings of Pz Lehr Div (1 SS Pz Corps) and 2 Pz Div (47 Pz Corps) indicated Allied intentions to collapse the Caen front by means of encirclement. In bitter fighting 2 Pz Div stood fast and ultimately gained some ground (O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, 15 Jun for 14 Jun). Reports were received that the commander of 12 SS Pz Div had been killed by enemy artillery fire on his command post (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl, Vol II, op cit, 1610 hrs 14 Jun). Witt was succeeded by Standartenfuehrer Meyer, (paras 58 and 58fn above.)

92. According to Schramm the Fuehrer now realized the necessity of weakening in favour of Normandy all fronts but Fifteenth Army's. In a directive prepared on that day but not delivered before the afternoon of 16 Jun, O.B. West was informed:

86 Corps was to be moved in from First Army;

Pz divs now committed were to be relieved by infantry divisions;

One division was to be made available by each of the following: Armed Forces Commander Netherlands, Fifteenth Army, Nineteenth Army;

In exchange, Fifteenth Army was to receive 363 Inf Div from Denmark and 87 Inf Div from Norway; Nineteenth Army was to receive 198 Inf Div and small units from the home-area....

(Schramm, Der Westen, op cit, p. 42)

93. East of the Orne the situation had become static. 81 Corps received promises of substantial artillery support in the near future. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, 14 Jun)

15 Jun

94. The day's fighting was on a minor scale, and the command staffs were mainly thinking in terms of the forthcoming major developments. In a telephone conversation with C. of S. Seventh Army, at 2150 hrs, Marshal Rommel expressed the opinion:

... If absolutely necessary, the front line must be turned and Normandy abandoned. The danger of a thrust toward Paris is more serious than a thrust toward Brittany.

(W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, 15 Jun)

At the same time 'Foreign Armies West' circulated the following estimate:

...[the section] remains of the opinion that the commitment of the enemy forces in south-eastern England will take place in a manner permitting early operational combination with the forces of Montgomery.*

('Foreign Armies West', Sitreps, op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilungen West, No. 1297, p.2, 15 Jun 44)

Lt Gen Gause appointed C. of S. Panzer Group West (15 Jun)

95. The main body of 363 Inf Div was now in transit from Denmark and would be available in the Turnhout - Beverloo area by 17 Jun, and Fifteenth Army therefore was now able to issue the order for the despatch of 1 SS Pz Div to Seventh Army (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, pp. 158 and 162, 15 Jun). Headquarters Panzer Group West, almost wiped out

*The same document contained the following:

...The American Army Group [still in England] comprises, in round figures, about 23 - 25 large formations (exclusive of the five formations believed to be in the Midlands of England). From the standpoint of quality, due to the inclusion of the highly-rated Canadian divisions, and despite the lack of seasoned formations, it might hardly take second place to any appreciable extent to the Army Group Montgomery. (Ibid, p. 1)

during the night 10/11 Jun (para 49 above), reached Paris - Auteuil on 14 Jun and began filling the vacancies. On 15 Jun Lt Gen Alfred Gause arrived and assumed the duties of C. of S. Pz Gp West.* (Ibid, 15 Jun)

16 Jun

96. Indecisive fighting continued in the Caen sector. East of the Orne a carefully mounted attack by elements 346 Inf Div and 21 Pz Div (Group Luck) produced initial gains but bogged down in the afternoon due to concentrated fire from heavy Allied naval guns. On the left wing of 1 SS Pz Corps an Allied major attack seemed to be in the making. (O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, Sitrep 17 Jun for 16 Jun).

Headquarters 86 Corps preparing to assume Command from Orne to Seine (17 Jun)

97. Headquarters 86 Corps, since 20 Aug 43 under command of Gen Inf Hans von Obstfelder, with 276 Inf Div (to come from the Bayonne area) and 16 G.A.F. Div (to come from the Amsterdam area), under command of Seventh Army would now shortly take over the sector from the Seine to the Orne. The Army boundary would be moved to the Seine (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl, Vol II, op cit, 2000 hrs 16 Jun). General Erich Marcks, Cmdr 84 Corps, who had been killed on 12 Jun (para 10fn above), had been replaced in the meantime by General Wilhelm Fahrmbacher (Ibid, passim, 12-16 Jun). Fahrmbacher had been Seventh Army's choice for the vacancy, but on 18 Jun he was told to return to his own Corps (25 Corps), and Lt Gen Dietrich von Choltitz, who had been sent to O.B. West on 13 Jun for employment as a corps commander, was placed in command of 84 Corps (Ibid, 1000 hrs 18 Jun; OKH Personnel Files, op cit, von Choltitz)

17 Jun

98. In the evening of 16 Jun 81 Corps had reported on the telephone that east of the Orne "nothing could be done" unless the enemy naval artillery was eliminated (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, p. 164, 1920 hrs 16 Jun). Early on 17 Jun Fifteenth Army informed the Corps that inability to carry out the assigned task would have to be reported in writing (Ibid, p. 166, 17 Jun). During the day General von Obstfelder appeared at the headquarters of 81 Corps and began his preparations for taking over the sector (Ibid). To reverse the tactical situation, however, would have required a good deal more than a mere change in command arrangements. In his post-war narrative General Kuntzen writes that 81 Corps was unable to deal with the situation in a proper manner because every move had to have prior consent from OKW, hundreds of kilometres away in Eastern Prussia, and that all his suggestions were turned down with sharp orders not to give up any strongpoints. (Kuntzen, 81 Corps, op cit, Transl pp. 26-27)

*Gause had been Speidel's predecessor as C. of S. A Gp B (10 Jul 43 - 15 Apr 44). Earlier he had been C. of S. Panzer Group Africa (15 Aug 41 - 6 Dec 42) (OKH, Personnel Files, op cit, Gause)

Hitler, Rundstedt and Rommel confer at Margival (17 Jun)

99. According to Schramm, O.B. West had requested that the Chief or Deputy Chief of OKW call at his headquarters for a discussion of the forthcoming operations. But Hitler decided instead to fly to the West in person, and on 17 Jun, Marshals von Rundstedt and Rommel reported to him at the Headquarters "W 2", at Margival, five miles northeast of Soissons (Schramm, *Der Westen*, op cit, p. 43; Jodl, *Diary Notes*, op cit, 17 Jun). On the basis of Jodl's diary notes the sum total of the decisions made at Margival was that the Fuehrer gave permission to make such small changes in the frontlines of 1 SS Pz Corps as the situation required (*Ibid*). A lengthy and interesting description of the Margival proceedings has been supplied by General Speidel. When the dramatic and futile interview was over, Hitler and Rommel had become antagonists. Some of the highlights in Speidel's account are briefly summarized below:

...Hitler spoke bitterly of his displeasure at the success of the Allied landings, for which he tried to hold the field commanders responsible,

...Rommel frankly described the hopelessness of the struggle against such tremendous superiority in the air, at sea and on the land.

...Rommel declared the "fortresses" to be a senseless waste of materiel and men; but he warned in vain.

...Rommel predicted Allied thrusts, one towards Paris, the other one to cut off Brittany.

...Rommel demanded unrestricted freedom of action in the West, assignment of first class panzer forces, air cover and naval support. Field Marshal von Rundstedt supported his demands.

... Hitler could not see the truth of this estimate, he confined himself to a monologue on the decisive effects of the guided missiles then being taken into use.

...Jodl promised reinforcements; Hitler talked of "masses of jet-fighters" to shatter Allied air supremacy.

...Rommel doubted whether the Russian front could be held. He concluded his critical examination of the situation with an urgent request that the war be brought to an end. Hitler cut Rommel off abruptly. The gulf between Hitler and Rommel had widened.

(Speidel, *Invasion 1944*, op cit, pp 92-99)

18 Jun

100. Fighting in the Caen sector on this day was confined to inconclusive minor undertakings east and west of the Orne. Army Group B still believed in the imminence of an Allied assault on the Dieppe - Le Havre coast:

...The situation was again reported to OKW; the Army Group is reckoning with an attack in the next few days on 81 Corps in the area of Fifteenth Army.

(W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, pp. 170-171, Statement by General Speidel in tel cons with C. of S. Fifteenth Army, 0945 hrs 18 Jun)

The command staff "Panzer Group West" (paras 49 and 95 above) was now almost ready to resume its functions, and Marshal Rommel discussed its future role with General von Geyr. Shortly afterwards Army Group B notified the Panzer Group formally of its forthcoming employment as the highest command authority in the Seine - Drome sector, directly under Army Group B.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Appendices, op cit, Appx 5, A Gp B, Ops No. 3682/44, 18 Jun 44)

Rommel still apprehensive of a Second Landing further North (19 Jun)

101. East of the Orne Group Luck made small gains in bitter fighting; west of the Orne Allied probing attacks on both sides of Tilly-sur-Seulles and at Longraye and Livry were repulsed (O.B. West, Sitreps, op cit, Sitrep 20 Jun (for 19 Jun)). -- In his account of the Margival conference Speidel writes that Rommel at that time no longer believed in a second big landing north of the Seine (Invasion 1944, op cit, p. 95). However that may have been, it is interesting to note that Army Group B's "Weekly Report" (Wochenmeldung), issued at 1900 hrs 19 Jun over the typed name "Rommel, General Field Marshal", and handsigned by Speidel, carried the following estimate:

... To judge from the enemy grouping of forces and the tactical and technical possibilities one can reckon with a large-scale enemy landing enterprise on the Channel front astride Cap Gris Nez or between the Somme and Le Havre.

The general attack [expected to be launched] from the Normandy bridgehead, and a fresh major landing operation might well be correlated in their timing and have as their joint operational goal the envelopment of the Paris area. (see also para 113 below)

(G.M.D.S. - 75145/5, A Gp B, Weekly Reports and Estimates, 20 May - Oct 44, A Gp B, Ops No. 3723/44, 1900 hrs 19 Jun 44) (981AGpB(D3))

102. On the same day Panzer Group West received two map studies which had been prepared by Marshal Rommel and sent to O.B. West for information and to the Panzer Group for

guidance. Rommel was thinking of two ways in which the enemy in the bridgehead might be attacked. Each possible course of action was shown by means of arrows placed on separate maps. Rough tracings of the arrows on Studies No. 1 and No. 2 appear as Appendix "G" to the present report.

Study I dealt with an attack in the event of the Calvados front remaining more or less stable.

In the first phase 47 Pz Corps* and 2 SS Pz Corps were to break through across the road Caen - Balleroy whilst the enemy north of Caen was being kept pinned down.

In the second phase the combined armoured forces were to launch an attack with Bayeux as the focal point. This to drive a wedge into Montgomery's forces at the boundary between Second British Army and First American Army. Subsequently the main forces were to move westwards, 1 SS Pz Corps eastwards.

Study II dealt with an attack to be considered in the event of an Allied push in the direction Falaise - Paris.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps,
op cit, Appx 6, 19 Jun 44)

86 Corps assumes Command from Orne
to Seine (20 Jun)

20 Jun

103. At 0800 hrs 20 Jun, Corps Headquarters 86 Corps at long last assumed command (under Seventh Army) of the Seine - Orne sector (paras 92 and 97 above). Corps Headquarters were installed at Gerrots (18 km NW Lisieux). For the moment the Corps had only two divisions under command: 711 Inf Div, with headquarters at Chateau le Quesnay (1 km N Glanville, 20 km NW Lisieux), and 346 Inf Div, with headquarters at St. Leger Dubosq (21 km NW Lisieux). At the same time the Seine had become the inter-army boundary. On the Cotentin the fighting was approaching a climax, but in the Caen sector action still was of merely local significance. (O.B. West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 20 Jun; A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 20 Jun)

Hitler demands armoured Attack against
Enemy in Balleroy Area (20 Jun)

104. During the day O.B. West informed the Panzer Group of the receipt of an OKW Order (No. 772006/44, signed Jodl, dated 20 Jun) according to which the Fuehrer desired an attack with the combined forces of 1, 2, 9, 10 SS Pz, 2 Pz and Pz Lehr Div to destroy the Third American Corps in the Balleroy area. Prior to the attack it would be necessary to relieve 2 Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div with the first infantry divisions to reach the area. In addition the enemy east of the Orne was to be destroyed in order to free the G.H.Q. troops concerned for the main attack. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 10)

*Cmdr: Gen Pz Tps Freiherr Hans von Funck

Seventh Army Casualties 6 - 18 Jun

21 Jun

105. While Hitler peremptorily demanded the destruction of the enemy east of the Orne, the field commanders wondered who was going to do the job. Infantry might accomplish the task, but they were woefully short of infantry. 346 Inf Div now had a combat strength of 1359 all ranks; Group Luck counted 580 survivors; relief was not in sight as yet. In the rear areas 1 SS Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Corps were just beginning to reach their assembly areas. True enough, British Second Army was not yet ready either, but they were regrouping and concentrating their forces. - Seventh Army issued a statement on casualties. From 6 - 18 Jun, counting dead, wounded and missing, the Army had suffered the following losses:

644 Officers (incl 55 commanding officers)
23,618 NCOs and Men
1,676 Eastern Volunteers

(O.B. West, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 22 Jun for 21 Jun;
A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 22 Jun for 21 Jun)

Divisional Boundaries in Caen Sector
(22 Jun)

22 Jun

106. The artillery build-up east of the Orne was making progress. Three batteries of 763 GHQ Hy Arty Bn had reached Dozule (22 km NW Lisieux) on the previous day, the balance was approaching the sector (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 21 Jun). On 22 Jun 555 GHQ Hy Arty Bn reached the Corps area (O.B. West Daily Sitreps, op cit, 23 Jun for 22 Jun). The remnants of 716 Inf Div were on the way to First Army. 1 SS Pz Corps was aware of Allied regroupings and preparations forward of Le Mesnil. Divisional boundaries in the Caen sector were now:

21 Pz Div (less Group Luck, east of the Orne)

right: River Orne
left: Railroad Caen - Douvres

12 SS Pz Div

to: Watercourse of creek 400 m W
Fontenay Le Pesnel - Ducey

Pz Lehr Div

to: Villers Bocage - road bend 1.8 km NE
Torteval - cross roads 700 m S St. Paul
Du Vernan - western fringe Bois du Cernay.

(This also boundary between 1 SS Pz
Corps and 47 Pz Corps) (Ibid)

'Foreign Armies West' estimated the strength of the American Army Group in E and SE England at 28 large formations. From three to four airborne divisions from Western England might be added to these. All in all these forces represented a strength closely corresponding to that of Army Group Montgomery. Regarding the prospective moment for commitment of this American Army Group it was to be noted that preparations for airlanding and parachute operations had been completed and that there was a concentration of landing craft in the Harwich - Yarmouth area. (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, No. 1304, 22 Jun, Appx "Kurze Feindbeurteilung West")

23 Jun

107. East of the Orne Group Luck was dislodged from Ste. Honorine and unable to re-take the locality. The assembly of the panzer formations destined for the Caen sector was progressing well, but the infantry divisions being moved up to free armoured formations for the projected big attack, found themselves forced to march 150 - 200 kms and were making very slow progress (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 23 Jun). In order to speed up this movement A Gp B directed the Panzer formations to send transport columns to meet them (21 Pz Div for 16 GAF Div: H.Q. 2 SS Pz Corps for 276 and 277* Inf Divs). (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 12, 23 Jun)

Field Commanders predict Failure for
Balleroy Attack (24 Jun)

24 Jun

108. The projected armoured attack (paras 102 and 104 above) was discussed between Generals von Geyr and Gause and the commanders of 47 Pz Corps, 1 SS Pz Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps at a conference in Montmerrei (2 km W Montree). Right from the outset the Panzer Group made it plain that the ideas set forth were not entirely their own. It seemed to be the consensus of opinion that the armour would bog down in the fire of the naval guns. Furthermore it seemed probable that at the current rate of wastage 21 Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div would be barely fit for defence at the time the attack was to take place. Infantry replacement battalions were required urgently, 12 SS Pz Div in particular was very short of infantry. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 13, 24 Jun)

109. 'Foreign Armies West' continued stressing the expected commitment of "Army Group Patton".** Captured Allied orders for photo reconnaissances to be carried out along the rivers Touques and Risle seemed to point to an early push by Army Group Montgomery toward Paris. This seemed to lend added validity to their predictions of a forthcoming operation by the two Army Groups in combination. The time limit set for completion of the photo reconnaissance (7 Jul) seemed to indicate the operation was planned for the last ten days of July; statements made by the American ambassador at Ankara seemed to confirm these views. (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Sitrep No. 1306, 24 Jun, Appx "Kurze Feindbeurteilung West")

2 SS Pz Corps and 1 SS Pz Div
reach Paris Area - British Threat
to outflank Caen (25 - 26 Jun)

25 Jun

110. The main body of 2 SS Pz Corps and about one

*277 Inf Div was then stationed near the Gulf of Lyon, at Narbonne, under Nineteenth Army.

**This implied compliment is well in line with the admiration expressed for General Patton by most of the interrogated German officer prisoners of war. (Narrator)

half of 1 SS Pz Div had now reached their concentration areas west of Paris (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 25 Jun). But not only was the approach-march of the infantry divisions difficult and painfully slow (ibid), the whole German build-up was too slow and British Second Army was able to retain the initiative. On the left wing of 1 SS Pz Corps the British forces made a penetration 5 km wide and 2 km deep, Fontenay-le Pesnel and Invigny were lost, the breach was widened to the road Tessel - Bretteville - Vendee (Ibid). O.B. West noted:

... 1 SS Pz Corps reports inability to restore situation with its own forces.

... Elements of 1 SS Pz Div, therefore, must be made available to 1 SS Pz Corps.

(O.B. West, Daily Reports, op cit, 26 Jun for 25 Jun)

Seventh Army recorded:

1940 hrs A Gp B approves the commitment of two battalions of 1 SS Pz Div in the sector of 1 SS Pz Corps.

(W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 25 Jun)

East of the Orne the situation was still unchanged; on the Cotentin Cherbourg was about to fall. In the Caen sector Allied pressure was now forcing the Germans to continue and intensify the disastrous policy of exposing valuable assault forces to the relentless attrition characteristic of piecemeal defence operations.

26 Jun

111. The Allied effort against the left wing of 12 SS Pz Div assumed considerable proportions, but while ground was lost, an immediate breakthrough was prevented. Army Group B reported the expansion of the Allied break-in area by some 5 km in width and up to 3 km in depth; St. Manvieu, Cheux and Rauray were lost. By 1800 hrs British forces had reached Grainville-sur-Odon and apparently intended turning east:*

... This might be the opening phase of an operation in east-south easterly direction for a later push on Paris and with the immediate tactical goal of cutting off the Caen area.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 26 Jun)

112. During the day A Gp B decided to move 2 SS Pz Corps to the St. Symphorien - Thury-Harcourt area (W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, 26 Jun). In view of the growing number and forthcoming employment of German panzer formations in the eastern wing of the Normandy bridgehead it was becoming increasingly urgent to have matters handled by a higher command staff fully qualified for armoured operations. Panzer Group West was now nearly ready to resume its functions and notified O.B. West that its Tactical Group would be ready

*For an eye-witness account of the fighting during these days see: Meitzell, Caen-Falaise, op cit.

by 28 Jun; the Q Group by 1 Jul (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 26 Jun). Whether the German forces in the Caen sector would be able to regain the initiative was very problematical, but nevertheless General von Geyr dutifully provided Army Group B with a map sketch showing how he expected to conduct the attack demanded by the High Command (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 15, 26 Jun). A photostatic reproduction of General von Geyr's submission appears as Appendix "H" to the present report.

Continuing German Preoccupation with a possible Second Landing (26 Jun)

113. As the end of the month was drawing nearer a battle for Caen was clearly in the making, but at the same time the highest German command authorities were also still firmly convinced of a future second landing. 'Foreign Armies West' enlarged its argumentations upon the subject of a forthcoming operation against the "Central Channel Coast" (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Appx to Sitrep No. 1308, 26 Jun). At the Situation Conference of 26 Jun General Jodl urged preparations against landings in the Dieppe sector, while Hitler argued that a second landing in Brittany was still more probable unless the opponent wanted to carry out the Dieppe attack in order to capture the areas from which the flying bombs were being launched (Schramm, *Der Westen*, op cit, p. 49). Particularly noteworthy in this respect was the Weekly Situation Report of Army Group B, issued on 26 Jun over the signature of General Speidel, who too was still reckoning with a possible major assault north of the Seine, and was uneasy over the weakening of Fifteenth Army's defence potential by the transfer of 1 SS Pz Div to Seventh Army. (A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit, Report for Week 19 - 26 Jun, A Gp B, Ops No. 4043/44, 26 Jun 44)

27 Jun

114. Checking the British drive on 26 Jun had been costly, particularly to 12 SS Pz Div. All available elements of 1 SS Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Corps were now moving toward the penetration area. In the meantime the British attack had been resumed in the area south of Fontenay - Le Pesnel, and in the evening the German forces near Mondrainville were forced off the Caen - Villers Bocage road. Armoured elements of 12 SS Pz Div were embroiled in a losing fight near Cheux (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 27 Jun); by 2300 hrs they had fallen back to the northern outskirts of Baron (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol 1, op cit, 27 Jun). Stop-gap battalions from 2 Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Div reached the Baron area late in the evening. Southeast of Caen, elements of 16 GAF Div had reached the Mezidon - Livarot area. The German forces in the Caen perimeter were now being thickened quickly; in the afternoon of 28 Jun Panzer Group West would assume command from Seine to Drome; Headquarters for the Panzer Group were being established 2 km SE Mittois (20 km NE Falaise). (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 27 Jun)

German Build-up too slow - Propitious Moment for Balleroy Attack missed - Signs of a possible concentric Attack on Caen (28 Jun)

28 Jun

115. The first class panzer formations earmarked for the planned drive toward the general area of Bayeux were

now coming to hand, but the Germans had been beaten to the punch and there was no time for marshalling troops and staging the attack properly. Pressure had now also developed north of Caen, particularly from Cambes toward Epron; Epron was lost. In the area of the deep penetration at Baron the defending elements of 12 SS Pz Div were forced back to and beyond the Caen - Evrecy road northeast of Esquay (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 28 Jun; W.D. Seventh Army, Sit Maps, op cit, 28 Jun). East of the Orne too the signs pointed to a forthcoming attack; the original picture of an enveloping southward drive past Caen might well be changing to one of a concentric attack on that city. (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol I, op cit, 28 Jun, passim)

General Dollmann dies; General Hausser
assumes Command of Seventh Army (28 Jun)

116. At 1000 hrs 28 Jun the commander of Seventh Army, Col-Gen Friedrich Dollman died as a result of a heart attack (Telephone Log of the German Seventh Army from 6 - 30 Jun 44, British Air Ministry Translation No. VII/70) (981.025(D2)). At 1335 hrs Seventh Army was told that General von der Chevallerie had been placed in command of the Army (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 28 Jun). This was almost certainly Col Gen Kurt von der Chevallerie, the commander of First Army, and it was also almost certainly a stop gap appointment made by Rommel pending the announcement of Hitler's final choice. Indeed, before many hours had passed Hitler made it known that he had chosen General Hausser (Comd 2 SS Pz Corps) to command Seventh Army (para 86 above). This appointment was politically astute and militarily quite sound, but it was bound to cause disappointment in some quarters. General Geyr, for one, may have been displeased. But even though he may have failed to sense his approaching removal from command (para 128 below), he must have been fully aware of Hitler's and his own operational thinking being worlds apart and wholly incompatible. In discussing the problem of this succession General Speidel writes that political considerations prevented Hitler at the time from appointing the eminently suitable and immediately available General Erich Marcks (Invasion 1944, op cit, p. 107). Speidel may not have expressed himself quite precisely in this matter, for Marcks had been killed on 12 Jun (para 97 above).

Reconstituted Headquarters Panzer Group
West (von Geyr) resumes operational
Duty. - Composition of Panzer Group
West (28 Jun)

117. General Dollmann's death had occurred at a rather inopportune moment, just when Marshals von Rundstedt and Rommel were preparing to follow a hurried summons to Berchtesgaden (para 119 below) and 2 SS Pz Corps was getting set for the attack planned for the next day. General von Geyr had barely announced his assumption of command over 1 SS Pz Corps,

2 SS Pz Corps, 47 Pz Corps and 86 Corps* (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 19, Pz Gp West Ops No. 6/44, 1700 hrs 28 Jun) when he received word not only of General Hausser's appointment to the command of Seventh Army but also of the Panzer Groups temporary subordination [during the absence of the two Field Marshals] to Seventh Army (Ibid, Appx 20, Seventh Army, Ops No. 3476/44, 28 Jun). Hausser was urgently needed at Army Headquarters, and pending settlement of the necessary changes in appointment he agreed to have 2 SS Pz Corps attached to 1 SS Pz Corps "for tomorrow's attack only". (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 1810 and 1930 hrs 28 Jun)

General Bittrich in Command of 2 SS Pz Corps: - Beaten to Punch by British Drive, 2 SS Pz Corps launches Counter-attack in Afternoon (29 Jun)

29 Jun

118. On 28 Jun 1 SS Pz Corps had informed the Panzer Group of its inability to cope with the situation in the Baron area, even with the help of 1 SS Pz Div. The danger existed "of the enemy pushing through to the Orne, with the result that Caen would be lost". On the other hand 2 SS Pz Corps reported that the counter-attack could not be delivered before 29 Jun. During the night 28/29 Jun, 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs and two projector brigades would assemble and, attacking across the Gavrus - Noyers line, recapture the Baron - Mouden - Cheux area, subsequently destroying the enemy on the near side of the Caen - Villers-Bocage road (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 28 Jun). But during the night road jams delayed the assembly of the troops and the attack had to be postponed (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 22, 29 Jun). According to the Daily Report of Army Group B the British attempt to gain possession of the Caen area grew in intensity on 29 Jun. Finally, at 1430 hrs, the 2 SS Pz Corps attack got under way. Harassed by fighter-bombers and heavy artillery fire it nevertheless succeeded in obtaining some initial success. 10 SS Pz Div captured Gavrus, and 9 SS Pz Div

* 1 SS Pz Corps
 1 SS Pz Div
 12 SS Pz Div

 2 SS Pz Corps
 9 SS Pz Div
 10 SS Pz Div

 47 Pz Corps
 Pz Lehr Div
 2 Pz Div

 276 Inf Div [en route]
 277 Inf Div [en route]

 86 Corps
 711 Inf Div
 346 Inf Div
 21 Pz Div
 16 GAF Div [en route]

(Ibid)

reached Mondrainville. By nightfall, however, the opposing forces had become enmeshed in bitter fighting (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 29 Jun) and the Panzer Group reported merely its intention of continuing the attack during the night 29/30 Jun (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 25 29 Jun). During the day General Bittrich (para 86 above)* had assumed command of 2 SS Pz Corps. In the evening General von Geyr instructed him to pursue the attack during the night as long as his forces were able to do so; this attack was the big opportunity. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 29 Jun)

Hitler, Rundstedt and Rommel confer at Berchtesgaden. Hitler renounces planned thrust "Balleroy - Carentan - Cherbourg" (30 Jun)

119. It seems probable that the Berchtesgaden discussions between the Fuehrer and his Western Marshals took place on 29 Jun. Jodl (Diary Notes, op cit, p. 31) as well as Schramm (Der Westen, op cit, p. 53) give 29 Jun as the date of the conversations and of Hitler's reluctant decision to desist from the projected attack with Cherbourg as its ultimate goal. Zimmermann and Rundstedt, however, give 30 Jun as the date of the conversations ("A Study in Command", op cit, p. 115). Partly because Zimmermann was not present at Berchtesgaden, and partly for personal reasons, Marshal von Rundstedt added some interesting comments to Zimmermann's account:

The conference, in which Field Marshal Sperrle** also took part, was restricted, at my request, to the smallest number of participants. After Rommel and I had given an exhaustive exposition of the complete untenability of the situation, no clear decision was reached. Always: Hold! Hold! New weapons are coming, new fighter planes, more troops -- and the same old talk. Here again we said that something political must happen. Icy silence.

I left the conference without any hope, arrived in St. Germain after 18 hours journey by automobile, and found the situation there had become still more acute.

The next day I was dismissed!

Among my closest collaborators I certainly often mentioned that in view of the constant tutelage exercised from "above", and of my age and state of health, I did not feel inclined to retain my position for long. I never made a request for retirement, in the West.

On the occasion of the Berchtesgaden conference with Hitler on 30 Jun, to which I went by automobile and not in a comfortable special train (I travelled

*On 30 Jun Himmler appointed Bittrich to command 2 SS Pz Corps and Standartenfuehrer [Sylvester] Stadler to command 9 SS Pz Div (W.D. Seventh Army, op cit, 30 Jun 44)

**Sperrle, Hugo, Field Marshal German Air Force, Cmdr Third Air Fleet

from 29 Jun to 1 Jul -- a very great exertion), and after I had to wait for another six hours beyond the time appointed for the meeting, I let Keitel know -- in my annoyance -- that they need not be surprised up "above" if I too, an old and sick man, fell dead one day, like Col Gen Dollmann. On the strength of that I received, the very day after my return to Headquarters, a handwritten letter from Hitler in unusually friendly terms, requesting, in consideration of my health and of the increased exertions to be expected in the near future, that I turn over my command to Field Marshal von Kluge. The latter arrived at our headquarters as early as 3 Jul 44. I myself was just as surprised as my officers. In the prevailing situation I would never have asked to be relieved... but would have continued to do my duty as a soldier until the end.

I believed that because of the unsatisfactory general situation this welcome excuse was taken to relieve me, in order to have a scapegoat ... Keitel [later] mentioned of his own accord that my assumption was correct. (Ibid)

Stalemate in Caen Sector. Von Geyr proposes withdrawal to Caen South - Caumont; Hausser and Rundstedt concur (30 Jun)

30 Jun

120. As a result of the day's clashes the British realized that their plans for capturing the Caen area had to be recast, and the Germans realized that the counter-attack was a failure and could not possibly succeed. O.B. West reported:

After several hours of fluctuating fighting the 2 SS Pz Corps attack was smothered by superior enemy forces in the line north of Esquay - Gavrus - Grainville. Our forces suffered grievous losses. It is intended to continue the attack during the night 30 Jun/1 Jul.

(Sitreps O.B. West, op cit, 1 Jul for 30 Jun)

An attempt to continue the attack was to be made, but the commander of Panzer Group West entertained no false hopes. During the day he despatched to Seventh Army (and "for information" to A Gp B and the Inspector General of Panzer Troops) an estimate of the situation in which he urged the evacuation of Caen North and the bridgehead. Caen South and the Orne were to be held, and a new frontline established in the general area Avenay - Villers Bocage - Caumont. "A breakthrough to the coast is no longer possible"; "the situation at Caen demands new and realistic command decisions" (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Pz Gp West, Ops No. 116/44, 30 Jun). Once more professional integrity had compelled a commander to offer advice, and once again this was to be the end of a great career. A translation of the document appears as Appendix "J" to the present report.

121. An entry in the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army indicates that the Army Group consented as early as 1900 hrs to the evacuation of the Caen bridgehead. But according to the War Diary of Seventh Army, C. of S. A Gp B informed Seventh Army shortly before midnight of the Army Group's approval of the planned evacuation, and Seventh Army passed

this along to Pz Gp West at 0040 hrs 1 Jul (W.D. Seventh Army, U.S. Transl Vol II, op cit, 30 Jun/1 Jul 44). Even in the latter case this "permission to withdraw" may have been premature and without full authorization.*

1 Jul

122. According to the War Diary of A Gp D it was at 0200 hrs 1 Jul that Marshal von Rundstedt received Army Group B's request for immediate permission to straighten the front by evacuating the Caen bridgehead and taking positions along the line Caen South - Orne - Bully - Avenay - Villers Bocage - Caumont area, and to concentrate the mobile reserves behind the eastern wing in order to cope with the expected enemy push from the east bank of the Orne towards Paris. Von Geyr's and Hausser's recommendations in this sense were appended to the document. O.B. West agreed fully with these estimates and at 0300 hrs 1 Jul asked OKW by telecommunication for a free hand to carry out the proposed evacuation. (G.H.D.S. - 75144/24, W.D. A Gp D (O.B. West), 1 - 31 Jul 44, 1 Jul 44) (Photostat 981CW(D31))

Hitler demands present Lines be held.
Crisis of Confidence (1 Jul)

123. Hitler disagreed with these recommendations. At 1740 hrs O.B. West received the following message:

The present positions are to be held. Any further enemy breakthrough must be prevented by obstinate defence or local counter-attacks.

(Ibid, 1740 hrs)

Whilst this order was being relayed to the lower formations O.B. West assessed the probable consequences of this unwelcome decision but refrained from informing OKW of his conclusions (Ibid). General von Geyr was either less cautious or less acutely aware of the dismal fate in store for his nation, at any rate later in the evening Rundstedt received word of Rommel and the Inspector General of Panzer Troops having received a message from Geyr in which he said the proposed evacuation would not have been a "running-away" but a sensible withdrawal of men who were now merely serving as targets for naval guns. As this message was bound to reach Hitler via the Inspector General, Rundstedt passed it along to OKW. (Ibid)

*Rommel's role in this matter is somewhat obscure. It is known, however, that on his return from Berchtesgaden he conferred with General von Geyr at the headquarters of the Panzer Group (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 1 Jul) and expressed his reluctance to yield as much as Geyr proposed. He stressed the importance of Caen as the anchor point for the expected Allied lunge towards Paris and said it was important to concentrate more and more German forces in that general area. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 35, 2 Jul 44, Record of Rommel - von Geyr conversation at 1200 hrs 1 Jul 44) (Photostat and translation 981PA5(D4))

124. OKW's reaction to the evacuation proposed by the Marshals was recorded by Schramm:

In their reply on 1 Jul OKW called the submission of O.B. West the final renunciation of a clearance of the invasion front and the acknowledgment that we had not and would not succeed in coping with scarcely one third of the enemy's forces. It meant also the absolute tying down of the forces committed and an expenditure of personnel and material which could not be maintained forever. After sober reflection the proposal had to be evaluated as the commencement of the evacuation of France....

A solution for this crisis in command was found in changes of personnel.

(Schramm, Der Westen, p. 55)

125. 2 SS Pz Corps' attack, which had been smothered on 30 Jun, and was to be continued during the night 30 Jun/1 Jul (para 118 above), failed to make much headway during that night. By midnight it was stalled again before reaching Baron. 10 SS Pz Div in consequence was taken back to its starting lines (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, op cit, 1 Jul). Tremendous bombardment from the air, sea and land prevented the attack from getting under way again during the day (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 1 Jul). East of the Orne two battalions of 16 GAF Div were now at the front, two were ready for action in their assembly positions and the balance of the Division was approaching the combat zone. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, Supplement to Daily Report for 1 Jul 44)

Von Rundstedt replaced by von Kluge:
Von Geyr replaced by Eberbach (3 Jul)

2 Jul

126. The liveliest action of a relatively quiet day in the Caen sector took place in the area of 1 SS Pz Corps, where an enemy attack in battalion strength was carried out from Baron in the direction of Hill 112. During the day Hitler's Army Adjutant, Lt Col Borgmann, G.S.C., appeared at the headquarters of Field Marshal von Rundstedt and presented him on behalf of the Fuehrer with the "Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross". At the same time he informed Rundstedt of the forthcoming "changes in personnel", namely Rundstedt's removal (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 2 Jul). In half-hearted compliance with Hitler's order for obstinate defence, the commander of Panzer Group West issued a special order instructing his forces to fight mainly with "fire", to husband their forces, to rehabilitate the troops and form reserves. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Pz Gp West Ops No. 48/44, 2 Jul)

3 Jul

127. At 1000 hrs the new O.B. West, Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge arrived at Rundstedt's headquarters. In the afternoon von Kluge went to Rommel's headquarters and stressed that operations must be conducted in the following manner: defence, absolute holding of present lines, advance upon most careful preparation. Von Kluge thereupon returned to the headquarters of O.B. West and assumed command as O.B. West at 2000 hrs. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 3 Jul)

128. In the early afternoon of the same day A Gp B advised General von Geyr of his immediate relief and replacement on the Fuehrer's orders by General of Panzer Troops Heinrich Eberbach. Eberbach assumed command at 1800 hrs. Formal notification of the two changes in command was forwarded to the Panzer Group by A Gp B on 4 Jul (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 52, 4 Jul for 3 Jul 44). In his well-written and informative post war narrative, General Eberbach gives 30 Jun as the date on which he was instructed to proceed to the Panzer Group (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-840, Eberbach, Report on the Fighting of Panzer Group West (Fifth Panzer Army) from 3 Jul to 9 Aug 44) (981SOM(D123) German and English, hereafter referred to as Eberbach Report). Since it was on 30 Jun that General von Geyr took the initiative in proposing a withdrawal from the Caen bridgehead (para 120 above) it seems probable that Hitler decided on these changes in command as soon as he became aware of the intentions of his field commanders. When Rommel heard of Rundstedt's and von Geyr's removal he said: "I shall be next!" (von Geyr, Pz Gp West, op cit, p. 56). Evidently Hitler regarded a removal of Rommel as impolitic at the moment, and the Field Marshal was retained in command of A Gp B until his accident on 17 Jul (para 157 below), which was kept secret for similar reasons for a period of several weeks. ("A Study in Command", op cit, p. 121)

129. General Blumentritt, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff was not removed. He had served as Kluge's Chief of Staff in Russia, and knew him "as well", he writes, "as anyone can know a two-faced man". He describes von Kluge as self-possessed, of cold nature, ambitious and not without vanity; a soldier without fear or personal indulgence:

...the one who feared him was done for, von Kluge simply squashed him. But he respected and accepted the one who did not fear him, the one who dared to say "No" perhaps in an impertinently facetious manner. In 1941 and 1942 in the East he had frequent and lengthy telephone conversations with Hitler. Once he said: "Yes, my Fuehrer, such is the situation! You must come down from your "Wolkenkuckucksheim" (Cloud-Cockoo-Land)!" He spoke in such a way without difficulty. He spoke without pause and was not to be interrupted -- even Hitler could not get in a word edgewise. If von Kluge did not like a remark of Hitler's he simply hung up. ...That was in 1941 and 1942. But if he went in person to see the Fuehrer, then it was the reverse! Hitler talked him to a standstill, and once von Kluge said to me: "I came out in a daze and could remember only afterwards what I had intended to say".

("A Study in Command", op cit, pp. 89-92, Section: Blumentritt, "Three Marshals, National Character and the 20 July Complex")

130. It is perhaps not surprising to note a clash of personalities between the cold, distant and efficient Prussian Kluge and the softer middle-class Bavarian Blumentritt. Zimmermann, the perpetual First Operations Officer of Army Group D, may have understood von Kluge better, or known him less well; at any rate he is less critical and describes him as a representative of the old army of the Kaiser, a man of lofty convictions, not without vanity, exact, clear, definite in his orders, grasping every detail of a matter. He demanded the utmost of his co-workers and subordinates, day and night. He was unmoved by danger, as a

military leader far above Rommel, and, in a different way, also above Model.* (Ibid, Zimmermann Narrative, p. 117)

131. General Eberbach, born in the year 1895 at Stuttgart, Württemberg, was an experienced and successful commander of armoured forces; according to Guderian (March 44) "one of the best in the German army". He was brave and capable and of kind disposition, a combination of qualities that gained him the loyalty of the troops (OKW, Personnel Files, op cit, Eberbach, passim) When he took over the Panzer Group 2 SS Pz Corps had lost Baron and was holding the line Verson - Hill 112 - Bougy. (Eberbach Report, p. 22)

132. The day's fighting was of little consequence. East of the Orne there were six British attacks in the strength of one or two battalions each. Three of the attacks resulted in local penetrations, but they did not create the impression of being part of the expected big attack "which might be launched rather from the Carentan area". (W.D. A Gp D, Jul 44, op cit, 3 Jul)

Both Army Group Headquarters still apprehensive of Second Landing further North (3 Jul)

133. On 3 Jul A Gp B issued the usual Weekly Report (27 Jun - 2 Jul). In this document the British attempt to capture the Caen area as a basis for future operations in the direction of Paris was described as the most significant event of the week. The enemy was slowed down by the heroic resistance of the Panzer divisions, and a breakthrough prevented in the end by the timely intervention of 2 SS Pz Corps. But German attempts by day and night to advance further towards the coast collapsed in heavy fire from all arms. Allied strength in the bridgehead was said to amount to 33 divisions plus strong G.H.Q. formations; in Great Britain there remained 64 large formations, of which 54 could be moved to the Continent:

There are no indications revealing the direction in which the First American Army Group in Great Britain will be moved. In the sense of an operation in combination with Army Group Montgomery and for the elimination of the revenge weapons, one must reckon with action on both sides of the Somme and down to the Seine.

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit, 27 Jun - 2 Jul, 3 Jul 44)

This was the estimate which appeared on 3 Jul over the signature of General Speidel.

134. Army Group D expected an American push from the St. Lô area towards Coutances and a British drive for Caen. The British assault was believed to come on a narrow front; most likely it would be conducted by the corps headquarters, five divisions and numerous G.H.Q. troops which had been freshly moved into the bridgehead. The Army Group in Southeastern England seemed still to be pointed toward the Somme - Seine zone. Moon and tides favoured such an undertaking during the middle of July. (W.D. A Gp D, Jul 44, op cit, 3 Jul)

*Model, Walter, Field Marshal, O.B. West 17 Aug - 4 Sep 44

4 Jul

135. One of the first official acts of the newly appointed commander of Panzer Group West was an application for the upgrading of his force to a Panzer Army. Since the Panzer Group consisted of four Corps' comprising a total of 13 divisions, he considered this necessary and justified (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 64, 4 Jul). The new designation was authorized on 27 Jul (para 189 below) (Ibid, 27 Jul)

Germans dislodged from Carpiquet. Corps
Boundaries of Panzer Group West (4 Jul)

136. The main engagement of the day took place in the Carpiquet area. After hard see-saw fighting the enemy [sc1 3 Cdn Inf Div] entered Carpiquet with tanks at 1630 hrs. By evening the locality was lost and a [German] counter-attack was ordered for 5 Jul (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 4 Jul) German tactical headquarters were now in the following locations:

1 SS Pz Corps at Clinchamp
2 SS Pz Corps at Campaudre
47 Pz Corps at St. Jean Le Blanc

In the meantime two regiments of 16 GAF Div had relieved the Battle Group of 21 Pz Div, and A Gp B intended to relieve:

12 SS Pz Div with 271 Inf Div
10 SS Pz Div with 272 Inf Div
9 SS Pz Div with 277 Inf Div
Pz Lehr Div with 276 Inf Div (this relief in progress)

The following new boundary lines became effective on 4 Jul:

86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps

Railway from the North toward Caen (86 Corps) --
western outskirts of Caen - railway Caen - Canon
(86 Corps)

1 SS Pz Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps

Bretteville (2 SS) - Marcelet (2 SS) -
Eterville (2 SS) - May (1 SS)

2 SS Pz Corps and 47 Pz Corps

Cristot (47 Pz) - Fontenay (47 Pz) -
Londes (47 Pz)

(W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 4 Jul)

Attack on Caen seems imminent. Rommel
desirous of leaving Caen without "being
fleece too much" (5 - 7 Jul)

5 Jul

137. 1 SS Pz Corps' attempt to recapture Carpiquet was a failure (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 67, Pz Gp West, Ops No. 138/44, 5 Jul; et al). Otherwise there was little action in the Caen sector. At 1200 hrs 16 GAF Div [composed of 31, 32 and 46 GAF Jg Regts] assumed command of the sector formerly under 21 Pz Div. 32 and 46 Jg Regts were committed in the area previously defended by Group Luck. 277 Inf Div was placed under 2 SS Pz Corps. Additional

elements of 1 SS Pz Div reached the concentration area Dreux - Evreux - Laigle (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 5 Jul). OKW informed O.B. West of the Fuehrer's particular interest in an early relief of 12 SS Pz Div (W.D. A Gp D, Jul 44, op cit, 5 Jul). 3 Cdn Inf Div had been identified in the Carpiquet area (G.M.D.S., No Number, A Gp D, Daily Intelligence Reports, 1 Jul - 30 Sep 44, 5 Jul) (981CW(D33)). Information had been received from reliable sources about numerous Allied bombing assignments for the Caen area; early continuation of the attacks was to be expected (Ibid, et al). Marshal Rommel and General Eberbach conferred on 5 Jul. Rommel said one ought to try getting out of the bridgehead without being fleeced too much; the Orne line, however, was to be held in any event. Von Kluge had proposed to concentrate the panzer divisions in the Vire area; this was not possible because the armour must be held close up to the infantry so that it would not appear too late at the scene of a breakthrough. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 65, 5 Jul)

6 Jul

138. In the Caen sector the day was uneventful. The boundary line between 10 SS Pz Div and 9 SS Pz Div was now as follows: Grimposq - Evrecy(10 SS) - Mondrainville (9 SS). Pz Group West was holding the line:

Southern outskirts Cambes - northwestern outskirts Buron - northwestern outskirts Gruchy to road Caen - Rots north of Carpiquet - there outposts in South - outpost road-fork western outskirts St. Germain - outpost railroad crossing east of and close to Carpiquet - outpost on field-path Carpiquet - Jumeaux - centre Jumeaux - northwestern outskirts Eterville - 100 metres northwest Chateau de Fontaine - road cross north of Hill 112 - northern outskirts Gavrus - 100 metres west of road-fork [sic] - 100 metres west Le Valtru - southwestern outskirts Grainville - northern outskirts Bordel.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 6 Jul)

7 Jul

139. Apart from lively reconnaissance activity the Allied ground forces in the Caen sector remained quiet, but aerial activity was intense (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 7 Jul). Between 2100 and 2200 hrs two to three hundred Allied bomber formations carried out an air attack on Caen (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 7 Jul). 21 Pz Div was being assembled in the area: Troarn - Hotto - Mezidon - Cagny (A Gp B, Daily sitreps, op cit, 7 Jul). A Canadian radio section was said to have been wiped out in an engagement at Pierreville (14 km NW Falaise). (A Gp D, Intreps Jul-Sep 44, op cit, 8 Jul for 7 Jul)

140. In the meantime American pressure against the front of 84 Corps had made it necessary to deprive Panzer Group West of Pz Lehr Div. O.B. West and Marshal Rommel had discussed the matter in the afternoon, and at 2000 hrs, despite the imminence of the attack on Caen, Pz Lehr Div was given orders for immediate departure in the general direction of St. Lô. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 7 Jul)

Hitler demands an Attack to split the
Allied Bridgehead (7 Jul)

141. On 7 Jul (Der Westen, p.58) the Fuehrer issued a new directive for the conduct of the operations in the West. The next operational target of the enemy would be an advance toward Paris on both banks of the Seine; a second landing and an attack on the French south coast were probable; a knockout blow against the enemy in the bridgehead was impossible at the moment; the enemy in the bridgehead must be contained at all cost. Therefore: the present positions were to be held, the panzer formations relieved and preparations made for an attack with limited objective to split the bridgehead if possible. The large reserves of Fifteenth Army were to stand pat until it was known whether the American Army Group would be used to carry out a second landing or to reinforce Army Group Montgomery in the lodgment. The text of this very comprehensive order is being retained by Hist Sec (G.S.) in photostatic form and full translation. (G.M.D.S. - 75145/6, A Gp B; Misc Fuehrer Orders, Jun - Sep 44, O.B. West, Ops No. 547/44, 8 Jun, informing A Gp B of Hitler's Order in OKW/WFSt No. 772343/44, dated 8 Jul) (981AGpB (D2))

The Fall of Caen (8 - 9 Jul)

8 Jul

142. Allied plans had called for the capture of Caen on D Day, but this had been impossible. But now, one month later, after careful preparations, the stage was set and the Germans about to be ejected from their anchor position. According to the Daily Report of Panzer Group West the situation in the area of 86 Corps, 1 SS Pz Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps developed in the following manner:

Following heaviest artillery preparation with all types and calibers from land, sea and air, which began in the evening of 7 Jul, early on 8 Jul the opponent launched the expected big attack on Caen with strong forces from the Northeast, North and Northwest. In the sector of 86 Corps Herouville and Lebisay were lost in hard fighting. Epron was lost and retaken. In the afternoon the enemy succeeded in taking Hill 64, which commands Caen from the North. Elements of 21 Pz Div are engaged in a counter-attack to restore the situation on Hill 64.

In the sector of 12 SS Pz Div Galmanche, Buron, Gruchy, Authie and Franqueville were lost in repeated heavy enemy attacks. Pressure of enemy tanks from Buron and Authie is continuing. With steadily increasing forces the enemy is attempting to force a breakthrough to Caen. The fighting in the bridgehead was particularly severe; casualties on both sides are considerable.

16 GAF Div's infantry elements west of the Orne suffered 75% casualties. Casualty reports from 12 SS Pz Div are not yet available. Operation was decisively affected by lack of ammunition....

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit,
Appx 85a, Pz Gp West, Ops No. 236/44, 8 Jul)

143. At 2100 hrs Marshal Rommel arrived at the command post of the Panzer Group for consultations with General Eberbach. Rommel approved the withdrawal of the heavy weapons from Caen and a regrouping in depth:

Pz Gp thereupon orders 86 Corps and 1 and 2 SS Pz Corps to withdraw all heavy weapons from Caen that same night. Strong infantry forces, supported by engineers, remain behind and offer resistance on the line: Calix - Hill 64 north of Caen - northern outskirts of St. Germain - airdrome 300 metres south of eastern extremity of Carpiquet. Only in the event of an enemy attack with superior forces is a withdrawal to be made to the line: east bank of the Orne - northern outskirts of Venoix - northern fringe of Bretteville.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 9 Jul; full text of order: W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 87, 8 Jul)

Situation sketches and some detail information on the events of 8 Jul in the Canadian sector have appeared in: Meitzell, Caen - Falaise, op cit, Part II. According to Meitzell the evacuation order reached the headquarters of 12 SS Pz Div at 0030 hrs 9 Jul.

9 Jul

144. It had been Marshal Rommel's hope to get the troops out of the Caen bridgehead without their being "fleeced too much" (para 137 above). But when 12 SS Pz Div on 9 Jul was finally driven out of Caen-North and St. Germain la Blanche Herbe, and forced back to the line: Caen-South - le Mesnil - Jumeaux, it was a badly depleted force. As recorded in the War Diary of A Gp D, the total infantry strength of the Division was now equal to that of one battalion; on 8 Jul alone 20 of the Division's tanks had become a total loss; the greater part of the anti-tank guns had been destroyed by enemy fire. All battalion commanders of 16 GAF Div's forces in the bridgehead had been killed or wounded (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 9 Jul). Since the beginning of the invasion 12 SS Pz Div had suffered the total loss of 44 tanks Mark IV (long barrel) and 21 tanks Mark V (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 9 Jul). To prevent an enemy breakthrough 1 SS Pz Div was moved up during the day along both banks of the Orne. (Ibid)

ALLIED PRESSURE HOLDS GERMAN MAIN STRENGTH ON EAST WING (10 - 27 JUL)

10 Jul

145. The Caen bridgehead had been lost on 8 and 9 Jul, but an Allied breakthrough had been prevented. On 10 Jul the focal point of Allied pressure on Pz Gp West was shifted to the area southwest of Caen. By afternoon 10 SS Pz Div had been dislodged from Eterville and Maltot. There was bitter fighting for Maltot and the northern approaches to Hill 112. In the evening a counter-attack by forces of 1 and 2 SS Pz Corps succeeded in retaking Maltot and regaining some ground north of Hill 112. 277 Inf Div* (H.Q. at Maisonnelles) took over the sector of 9 SS Pz Div, which now was assembled in the area: Clinchamp - Vieux (sic) - Evrecy - Neully - Banneville - Courvaudon (excl) - La Caine - Grimbosq (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 10 Jul)

*Cmdr: Lt Gen Albert Praun (May - 17 Aug 44)

Army Group B still apprehensive of a
Second Landing further North (10 Jul)

146. Obviously the British forces intended to reach and cross the Orne southwest of Caen (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 10 Jul). 'Foreign Armies West' continued expounding its theory of a forthcoming major landing in the central Channel area (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, Appx to Sitrep No. 1322, 10 Jul). Over the signature of Lt Gen Speidel, the formal 'Weekly Situation Report' of A Gp B (3 - 9 Jul) carried the following estimate of enemy intentions:

Once the Caen area has been occupied completely, and suitable bridgeheads established across the Orne, the enemy will launch his drive for Paris. Now, as before, one must reckon with a major landing by the First American Army Group in the zone of Fifteenth Army for an operation in combination with Army Group Montgomery and for the elimination of the revenge weapons.

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit, 3 - 9 Jul, 10 Jul)

11 Jul

147. At 0600 hrs 1 SS Pz Div took over from 12 SS Pz Div responsibility for the sector south of Caen. The following boundary lines became effective:

86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps:

Road Caen - Falaise (1 SS Pz Corps)

1 SS Pz Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps:

Barbery (1 SS Pz Corps) - Mutrey (1 SS Pz Corps) -
St. Martin (2 SS Pz Corps) - Carpiquet (2 SS Pz
Corps)

A British attack east of the Orne from Ste. Honorine towards Colombelles was repulsed. In hard street fighting in the morning 10 SS Pz Div had retaken Eterville, and had lost it again during an enemy attack with 60 tanks and heavy artillery support. A renewed counter-attack by forces of 1 and 2 SS Pz Corps' was reported to be in progress. North of Hill 112 the Germans had recaptured their former positions, including a wooded area on the eastern part of Hill 112, which had been lost during the night 10/11 Jul (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 11 Jul). In a conversation at 1830 hrs between the commanders of the Panzer Group and 2 SS Pz Corps, General Eberbach stressed again the importance of Hill 112; it was the pivotal point of the current operation; it was to be held at all cost; the loss of Eterville could be borne, but not that of Hill 112 (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 11 Jul). The attempted breakout across the Orne was meeting with determined German resistance. - A photostatic reproduction of the German Army General Staff Situation Map "France" for 11 Jul is being permanently retained by Historical Section (G.S.). (G.M.D.S. - OKW/WFSt/Ops, Misc Sit Maps "France"1944) (Photostat 981HC(D26))

12 Jul

148. Except for several fruitless Allied attempts during the night 11/12 Jul to reach Hill 112, the day's activities on the front of Panzer Group West remained confined on the whole to sudden British fire concentrations on Hill 112, Evrecy, Gavrus and the area of 276 Inf Div, and to German

harassing fire on recognized Allied assembly areas. British concentrations west of Le Mesnil, tank concentrations at the airdrome of Carpiquet, and lively traffic from Carpiquet, Breteville and Verson in southerly direction were taken as signs pointing to a continuation of the attack. 12 SS Pz Div (less the artillery regiment and one battalion still with 1 SS Pz Div) was recuperating in the area: Sassy - Condé - Garcelles - Pontigny - Bons. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 12 Jul)

13 Jul

149. At the front of Panzer Group West the lull in the fighting was continuing. The Germans concluded that the expected push was being prepared with great care (Ibid, 13 Jul). During the morning OKW acceded to O.B. West's request of the previous day for permission to move 326 Inf Div (Lt Gen von Drabich-Waechter) from Fifteenth Army (south of Boulogne) to Panzer Group West. It was decided to move 21 Pz Div to Fifteenth Army in exchange.* O.B. West had also asked for permission to bring in 11 Pz Div from First Army to the western part of the Normandy front. But Hitler had objected to this and suggested moving the formation to the Toulouse area of Nineteenth Army. In a subsequent telephone conversation O.B. West referred to the constant dwindling of his forces and requested reconsideration. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 13 Jul)

150. During the preceding days Hill 112 had changed hands several times. Finally, both sides were claiming possession of the feature. On 13 Jul General Eberbach made an inspection trip to the front and visited the German troops on Hill 112. He found that both sides occupied parts of the wide, flat height (Eberbach Report, transl p. 22). Some details of the fighting for the hill were recorded in a report that was prepared by the officer who accompanied Eberbach on the trip. The document appears as an Appendix to the Eberbach Report. In the main text Eberbach offered some observations of special interest to Canadians. In Normandy, just as in Italy, it was evidently the honourable fate of the Canadians to encounter some of the enemy's best formations. Of 12 SS Pz Div Eberbach says:

... Judged by the quality of the troops, their combat morale, equipment and training, it was the best division in the West.

(Ibid, transl. p. 17)

It was thanks to the combat performance of 12 SS Pz Div that the Germans had not been defeated at Caen at the beginning of the Invasion and during the recent fighting.

(Ibid, p. 21)

In connection with the see-saw fighting in the Verson - Hill 112 - Bougy area he writes:

The Canadians very stubbornly attacked this frontal sector practically every day. Their attack methods were different from the British. Although their advance was also preceded by bombing attacks and

*Due to subsequent developments 21 Pz Div could not be spared at the fighting front and remained south of the Seine till the last week of August 1944.

a heavy barrage, the forces committed to following up rarely exceeded one regiment and up to 50 tanks. Attacks on a larger scale were rare. This method might partly have been conditioned by the terrain which was more difficult to survey than usually. In general, however, the Canadian attacks seemed to be lacking some of the sureness and planning with which those of the British were being conceived. According to the impression we were given, the coordination between weapons was not yet quite up to the standard reached by the British. On the other hand the Canadians were perhaps less calm and more enterprising and more daring and tougher than the soldiers from the mother-country. I had the impression that the individual Canadian was a brave child of nature, and that therefore his average combat efficiency was superior to that of the British city dweller. The lower command of the Canadians, also, was good. On the other hand the British leadership of larger units seemed superior to me.

(Ibid, p. 22)

The Anglo-Canadian radio discipline was good. I insisted upon the installation of an efficient intercepting service from the beginning, also for the supervision of German radio discipline. As a result we soon succeeded in decoding some of the British radio messages. They were our most important source of intelligence information. Among other results, the bombing of staff headquarters which the enemy intended in our area, could mostly be made ineffective by intercepting the messages, and by their rapid transmission to those who were being threatened.

(Ibid, p. 23)

14 Jul

151. In the area of Pz Group West the day was uneventful. O.B. West returned from an inspection tour to Fifteenth Army, "whose dispositions enabled it to deal with an enemy landing from the sea or close to the coast from the air, but not with enemy descents in the rear areas. There was now not a single tank between the Scheldt and Somme". (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 14 Jul)

15 Jul

152. Panzer Group West reported steady artillery and mortar fire on its positions in general and on Hill 112 (10 SS Pz Div) in particular (Ibid, 15 Jul):

Increasing enemy harassing fire on area south-east of Caen, as well as sudden fire concentrations on Colombelles, Denouville, Banneville, Hill 112 and our battery positions in the sectors of 2 SS Pz Corps and 47 Pz Corps. ...Towards evening an enemy attack with very strong artillery support on Hill 112 and on both sides of that feature was repulsed.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 15 Jul)

153. The relief of elements 1 SS Pz Div with 272 Inf Div was now in progress; 271 Inf Div was gradually moving closer to relieving 10 SS Pz Div, the relief of 9 SS Pz Div with 277 Inf Div had been completed except for the artillery components; it was now intended to relieve 2 Pz Div with 326 Inf Div. A time table for further contemplated moves from Fifteenth Army to Normandy could not be prepared "as at the moment an enemy major landing in Fifteenth Army's zone is still to be expected". (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 15 Jul)

154. 'Foreign Armies West' estimated the situation in a similar manner:

On the basis of information obtained by photo reconnaissance over the bridgehead the enemy command plans, from about 17 Jul onwards, the start of an operation on a larger scale across the Orne towards the Southeast. It is worthy of note that this time coincides with the period most favourable for new landing operations.

(Sitreps, 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, 15 Jul)

German Order of Battle in France (15 Jul)

155. A graphic picture of the composition of O.B. West's forces on 15 Jul 44 appears in Appendix K to the present report. This Appendix consists of the O.B. West portion of the OKH Schematic Order of Battle of the German Army on 15 Jul 44.* ** (G.M.D.S. - OKH, Periodic Schematic Orders of Battle of the German Army) (Photostat of complete document: 981.045(D1))

16 Jul

156. Attacks on the left wing of Panzer Group West were heralding the imminent beginning of the expected major attack. There was considerable fighting during the night in the approaches to Hill 112, but the main pressure developed in the area: Gavrus - Bougy - Noyers. This indicated a forthcoming wheeling of the British forces for the purpose of delivering the main blow in a southeasterly direction. Over the considered objections of the two Army Group commanders Hitler insisted on moving 12 SS Pz Div to the area of 86 Pz Corps. General Warlimont*** told Blumentritt on the telephone that the Fuehrer was worried about the sector of 711 Inf Div, where there were no mobile forces in reserve, but from the tenor of an earlier conversation it is possible to surmise that Hitler was perhaps more interested in preserving the formation from being bled beyond recovery. According to O.B. West holding on to the area south of Caen mattered most, but he did not prevail (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 16 Jul). At 2100 hrs A Gp B issued the order for 12 SS Pz Div to proceed immediately to the area Lisieux - Pont l'Evêque, coming under command thereof of 86 Corps (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 16 Jul). 272 Inf Div was now in command of 1 SS Pz Div's sector; all three regiments of 277 Inf Div had been committed; the advance party of 326 Inf Div had reached the area of 47 Pz Corps. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 16 Jul)

*O.B. West section as of 17 Jul 44.

**For April, May and June 1944 issues see Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 40, op cit, Appx "G".

***Warlimont, Walter, Gen Arty, Deputy Chief WFSt.

Rommel injured (17 Jul)

17 Jul

157. An event of great and incalculable consequence occurred in the evening of 17 Jul, when Allied fighter craft on the routine pursuit of targets of opportunity caused Marshal Rommel's car to crash into a tree; Rommel was gravely wounded and eliminated from the scene at a moment when he was well on the way of turning from a soldier carrying out orders into a man taking a hand in shaping the future destinies of his ill-starred fatherland.* The incident occurred south of Lisieux on a road between Livarot and Vimoutiers near an estate named Montgomery. (Speidel Invasion, op cit, p. 118) Shortly before 2100 hrs General Speidel informed Army Group D of the event:

Immediately thereafter O.B. West discussed the situation on the telephone with the commander of Seventh Army, with Generals Jodl, Warlimont, Schmudt and with Generalstabsarzt** Dr. Haubenreisser, reported to O.K.W. that for the time being he had personally taken over command also of A Gp B. According to the doctor's findings Marshal Rommel had a fractured skull, a severe concussion of the brain and an injured eye. He would require medical attendance for a period of three months, and an additional three months for convalescence.

(W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 17 Jul)

Army Group B. Casualties 6 Jun - 7 Jul

158. A Gp B's usual Weekly Report (10-16 Jul) stressed the fact that casualties in Normandy (from 6 Jun - 7 Jul) had passed the one hundred thousand mark (100,089) against 8395 replacements received and 5303 earmarked for early despatch. Unless there was a change in this respect the forces would become burnt out. In his estimate of the situation General Speidel repeated his statement of 10 Jul (para 146 above). He added that the main weight of the whole enemy operation was apparently being carried by Army Group Montgomery, but one had still to reckon with a major landing of the First American Army Group in the zone of Fifteenth Army. Speaking of the situation at the front Speidel admitted that it had not been possible to carry out fully the intended relief of the panzer formations with infantry divisions; it had been necessary to re-commit the larger part of the armour. (A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit, 10-16 Jul, 17 Jul)

159. After a relatively quiet morning fighting had flared up again on the left wing of Panzer Group West. In the area between Maltot and south of Cavrus the British forces were repulsed; Bougy and Noyers changed hands several times. There was steady artillery fire on the front and rear areas; 9 SS Pz Div, 276 and 277 Inf Divs suffered severe casualties, already on 16 Jul 276 and 277 Inf Divs had suffered 1000 casualties each.

*This subject has been dealt with fully in; Desmond Young "Rommel", ed Collins, London, 1950, pp. 210-211; and: Speidel, Invasion 1944, op cit, pp. 118-119, et al.

**Generalstabsarzt: Rank for German Medical Officer (Equivalent to German rank of Lieutenant General). Haubenreisser was the Chief Medical Officer of Army Group D.

During the day 11 Pz Div received orders to move to the area Narbonne - Carcassonne - Montauban. The transfer of 19 Pz Div from Holland to Eastern Prussia was well under way. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 17 Jul) A Gp B had asked for permission to move 708 Inf Div, (on Coast defence duty south of Rochefort) to Seventh Army, but the request was declined on the grounds that no suitable replacement division was available. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 17 Jul)

Composition of Panzer Group West (17 Jul)

160. On the eve of the expected British breakout attempt Panzer Group West was composed as follows:

86 Corps	711 Inf Div
	346 Inf Div
	16 GAF Div
	12 SS Pz Div (in rear area)
	21 Pz Div (partly in rear area)
1 SS Pz Corps	1 SS Pz Div
	272 Inf Div
2 SS Pz Corps	Elements 10 SS Pz Div
	271 Inf Div
	9 SS Pz Div
	277 Inf Div
	Elements 10 SS Pz Div (in rear area)
47 Pz Corps	276 Inf Div
	2 Pz Div

Panzer Group Operational Reserve: None

(Appx "K" to present report)

Details of dispositions and locations were set forth in the Daily Sitreps of A Gp B (op cit) and shown to some extent on the OKH Sit Map "France" for 17 Jul 44. (Sit Maps "France", op cit, Photostat 981HC(D26))

Panzer Group West under heavy Pressure:
German Counter-attack fails (18 Jul)

18 Jul

161. At 0800 hrs A Gp B reported to A Gp D:

Since 0540 hrs heavy drumfire and area bombing by 800 - 1000 enemy aircraft on the bridgehead east of the Orne. The enemy attack in the Caen area, which has been expected for days for 17 or 18 Jul seems therefore to be commencing today eastwards of the Orne. Heavy enemy pressure and fighting also at the earlier penetration points in the sectors of 277 and 276 Inf Div.

At 1100 hrs A Gp B reported:

The heavy enemy drumfire on the east bank of the Orne is continuing. Simultaneously there are heavy enemy air attacks on the whole rear area of 86 Corps, as well as harassing fire from enemy gun boats on the sector of 711 Inf Div. According to unconfirmed reports 100 enemy tanks are moving southward from the area Escoville - Ste Honorine. The expected attack

is directly at hand. Local engagements in the other sectors.

At 1120 hrs General Speidel told A Gp D on the telephne that the enemy had broken through at and east of Cuverville with 60-70 tanks and had reached Cagny. From the East 503 G.H.Q. Hy Tk Bn and elements 21 Pz Div were counter-attacking, from the West elements of 1 SS Pz Corps. At 1125 hrs O.B. West confirmed presence of 12 SS Pz Div in the Lisieux area but gave orders to leave it there for the time being in accordance with the Fuehrer's order. At 1300 hrs A Gp B informed A Gp D:

Enemy is now also attacking the left wing of 346 Inf Div and has achieved a penetration in the direction of Troarn. One battalion is counter-attacking. On the right wing of 16 GAF Div the enemy has advanced past Touffréville with tanks and infantry. Breakthrough is being exploited towards the West, Northwest and Southwest. In the areas of 1 and 2 SS Pz Corps and 47 Pz Corps heavy enemy harassing fire.

1320 hrs A Gp B confirms the previously reported enemy successes. Situation threatening. A Gp B requests urgently permission for moving up 12 SS Pz Div to combat zone for intervention at boundary 16 GAF and 346 Inf Div.

1330 hrs A Gp D asks OKW/WFSt by telephone for the immediate release of 12 SS Pz Div. Upon repeated urging OKW grants permission at 1520 hrs.

At 1730 hrs O.B. West (at the moment in Poitiers at H.Q. 80 Corps) was told of the enemy's clearly discernible intention to traverse the marshy area of the Dives and Orne for a subsequent operation in open ground. In his capacity as O.B. West and commander of A Gp B the Marshal then issues the order to carry out a concentric attack with all available forces and to throw the enemy back to his starting positions at all cost. A sealing off, in other words, an enemy gain of ground in the Caen area could not be borne. O.B. West said he was breaking off his tour and returning to his headquarters (at St. Germain) during the morning of 19 Jul.

2000 hrs A Gp B reported:

Enemy penetration on the left wing of 346 Inf Div eliminated. Further West (in the sector of 16 GAF Div, which has been greatly weakened by the heavy drum fire and bombing attacks) the enemy has extended his penetrations to Bonneville and is advancing on Troarn... The holding attacks in area of 2 SS Pz Corps and 47 Pz Corps are continuing.

At 2230 hrs A Gp B reported:

... The counter-attack now in progress from southeast and southwest is being carried out by the following:

Under 86 Corps: a battle group of 21 Pz Div (Pz Regt, Recce Bn, plus 503 Hy Tk Bn).
Under 1 SS Pz Corps: 1 SS Pz Div (less one reinf bn).

Both groups are in touch with each other. 21 Pz Div ran into strong anti-tank fronts and violent artillery barrages. Suffered heavy casualties. (503 Hy Tank Bn has only nine tanks left). 1 SS Pz Div advanced smartly as far as Soliers but was thrown back by superior enemy forces.

Since 1900 hrs 12 SS Pz Div is moving up to the fighting area (strength: one tank battalion, two Pz Gren regts, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ arty bn). 12 SS Pz Div will be placed under 1 SS Pz Corps and committed at Cagny.

By evening A Gp D realized that the German counter-attacks would not succeed. C. of S. O.B. West as well as O.B. West in person held direct telephone conversations with the commander of the Panzer Group West. On the basis of the information supplied by General Eberbach O.B. West discussed with General Jodl the question of bringing in 116 Pz Div from Fifteenth Army (0030 hrs 19 Jul). OKW gave permission to do so. All concerned were immediately advised. *, **, *** (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 18 Jul)

162. A graphic description of the dramatic bombardment and of the desperate efforts of the Panzer Group's right wing on 18 Jul has been supplied by General Eberbach. Possibly unaware of the great losses in men and tanks inflicted on that day by the German defenders, General Eberbach claims British hesitancy was solely responsible for the failure to obtain a full and complete breakthrough on the first day of the operation. In consequence on 19 Jul British and Canadian troops faced once more a continuous German front. (Eberbach Report, pp. 23-29)

*A synopsis and in part verbatim report of the conversation between O.B. West and General Eberbach on 18 Jul appears as Appendix 150 in: W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, 18 Jul. Appendix 151 is A Gp D's message advising Pz Gp West of the forthcoming transfer of 116 Pz Div to the Falaise area. (Ibid)

**On 6 Jun 44 116 Pz Div was an OKW reserve quartered on the north bank of the Seine in the area Buchy (NE Rouen) - Les Andelys - Vernon - Gisors - Gournay. Since mid June the formation had been deployed in the Gamaches - Blangy area to bolster the coastal division there in the event of an Allied landing on the St. Valerie - Dieppe coast. (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-017, Voigtsberger [Cmdr 60 Pz Gren Regt 116 Pz Div] 116 Pz Div, 6 Jun - 12 Aug 44) (Photostat 981SOM(D134))

***Cmdr 116 Pz Div was Lt Gen Gerhard Graf von Schwerin (1 May - 20 Sep 44). Later (in the Italian theatre) he commanded 90 Pz Gren Div (10 - 26 Dec 44) and 76 Pz Corps (27 Dec 44 - to [presumably] surrender). On 1 Apr 45 he was confirmed as cmdr 76 Corps and promoted Gen Pz Tps (OKH, Personnel Files, op cit, Graf von Schwerin).

Von Kluge holds post mortem, finds too much strength on dormant fronts, not enough in Normandy, Panzer Group must be strengthened (20 Jul)

163. A rich source of authentic contemporary information on the attack south of Caen on 18 Jul is available in the form of Lt-Col Meyer-Detring's (Int Offr A Gp D) handsigned report on the post mortem held by O.B. West with his top commanders at the headquarters of Panzer Group West on 20 Jul 44. Apart from minor blemishes in tactical procedure everybody seemed to have performed as well as possible. In closing his summation Marshal von Kluge expressed the opinion that mere changes in tactics would be of no avail; what might be required would be important measures such as depleting the Biscay and Mediterranean fronts. (G.M.D.S. - 75144/33, A Gp D, Int Files July 44) (Photostat 981CW(D35) Reproduction of selected documents, Int No. 2153/44, 22 Jul, Report on Commanders Conference on 20 Jul 44). It will be noted that Marshal von Kluge did not mention Fifteenth Army's front, where, apart from 116 Pz Div which was now being moved in, there were about 18 divisions to choose from while 16 GAF Div was being crushed.

Von Kluge confirmed in dual Position as O.B. West and C.-in-C. Army Group B (19 Jul)

19 Jul

164. Compared to the violent action of the preceding day the British effort seemed to have lessened somewhat in intensity, but nevertheless the German forces lost further ground. South of Caen fighting developed during the afternoon in the area Gentheville - Cormelles - Fleury-sur-Orne, and a fierce struggle was being waged for the possession of Hill 67, south of Fleury-sur-Orne. During the night 12 SS Pz Div had reached the area south of Cagny and was now fighting again under command of 1 SS Pz Corps (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 19 Jul). At 2230 hrs General Eberbach ordered 47 Pz Corps to despatch one tank bn, one Pz Gren Bn and one regimental headquarters staff to 1 SS Pz Corps this very night. An hour later he instructed 2 SS Pz Corps to send one Panther battalion, one recon battalion and one artillery battalion to 1 SS Pz Corps (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 19 Jul). During the night Seventh Army had lost St. Lô. Keitel told Marshal von Kluge that Hitler wanted him to retain the command of A Gp B. In the evening von Kluge moved to the headquarters of Army Group B to be nearer to the scene of operations (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 19 Jul). While remaining O.B. West, he concentrated his efforts on the command tasks of A Gp B and left Blumentritt and Zimmermann much to their own devices. Thus he was separated not only physically but also mentally from the real staff of O.B. West, and gradually there arose dissension in command which gave rise to the ever increasing general desire to bring Marshal von Rundstedt back. The regular staff of O.B. West was for the most part eliminated from operational activities from 18 Jul until the beginning of Sep 44 ("A Study in Command", op cit, pp. 122-123).

20 Jul

165. Bad weather was depriving British Second Army of its usual air support. Action was confined in the main to the area between the Caen - Falaise road and the Orne. Pz Gp West reported:

After 90 minutes of drumfire the enemy broke into our lines with infantry and armoured forces south of Ifs in the right wing of 272 Inf Div, captured Hill 72 and subsequently St. Martin. Enemy forces which had advanced toward the South over Hill 67 (south of Fleury sur Orne) succeeded in taking St. André. Our own counter-attack from the South toward Hill 72 at first was halted by the enemy barrage and flanking fire from St. Martin, but was resumed and won back Hill 72 after bitter fighting. In continuation of the attack our own battle groups reentered St. Martin and St. André sur Orne. Fighting there still in progress. For the elimination of the break-in have been committed: From the South a Battle Group of 2 Pz Div (one tank battalion and one panzer grenadier battalion), from the East one tank battalion and one panzer grenadier battalion from 1 SS Pz Corps.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 20 Jul)

166. According to the War Diary of the Panzer Group the fighting in the St. André - St. Martin area was prolonged and bitter. Sepp Dietrich placed the commander of 1 SS Pz Div's Pz Regt [1 SS Pz Regt] in charge in the area in order to achieve unified command over the two groups pushing forward from the South and East. C. of S. Pz Gp West asked C. of S. 2 Pz Corps (SS - Obersturmbannführer Plepkorn) whether it was feasible to transfer the right Corps boundary of 2 SS Pz Corps to the Orne, so that 1 SS Pz Corps could transfer its center of gravity to the bridgehead east of the Orne. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 20 Jul)

British Build-up a Threat to Falaise

167. In its Daily Report A Gp B stated that the enemy had already four Inf Divs, three Armd Divs and two to three Armd Bdes in the Caen - Troarn sector, and would continue the attack (Ibid). In the Daily Intelligence Report of Army Group D, Meyer-Detring called the Falaise area the main target of the attack, and continued:

With a directly imminent large-scale attack from an unusually massive concentration of armour along the Caen - Falaise road must be reckoned all the more because the terrain there is particularly suitable for the employment of armoured formations.

(A Gp D, Introps, July 44, op cit, Int No. 5016/44, 21 Jul for 20 Jul)

Evidently the British were taking time out to fill up their formations. All possible measures must be taken to use the time thus gained for accelerating the movement of approaching 271, 326, 363 Inf Divs and 116 Pz Div. (W.D. A Gp D, 20 Jul)

168. According to a memorandum submitted by Pz Gp West to A Gp B on 20 Jul, since the beginning of the invasion the Panzer Divisions of the Panzer Group had suffered the following casualties:

1 SS Pz Div:	1,441
12 SS Pz Div:	6,164
9 SS Pz Div:	1,891
10 SS Pz Div:	2,289

Up to now the SS Fuehrungshauptamt had promised:

less than 1000 replacements for 1 SS Pz Corps
(1 and 12 SS Pz Divs)

and

1340 replacements for 2 SS Pz Corps (9 and 10
SS Pz Divs).

At the same time Pz Gp had been advised that after this, and for the predictable future, no further replacements would become available. It was suggested, therefore, to obtain replacement battalions from the army, as otherwise under present conditions the substance of the Panzer formations would be destroyed (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 173, Pz Gp West, Ops No. 480/44, 20 Jul).

Attempt on Hitler's Life (20 Jul)

169. Like lightning fleetingly illuminating a dark scene, the attempted elimination of Hitler, on 20 Jul, suddenly revealed for all to see the gravity of Germany's position. It does not fall within the scope of the present report to give a rounded picture of this complex matter, nor is the evidence available, or within reach, sufficiently complete to do so.* At the headquarters of Army Group D the execution and failure of the plot did not lead to immediate complications. At the time when the conflicting accounts and orders were clogging the channels of communication and the steps taken or not taken upon these orders were compromising many in the highest places, Marshal von Kluge was on his way back to La Roche Guyon from the commanders' conference at the headquarters of the Panzer Group (para 163 above). Blumentritt was on his way to join von Kluge, and Zimmermann received word of Hitler's survival before the conflicting orders began coming in. (W.D. A Gp D, 20 Jul)

21 Jul

170. In the area of Panzer Group West the fighting was still of local character and confined in the main to the St. Martin - St. André area:

In tough fighting, the battle groups thrown in to counter-attack forced an entry into St. Martin and St. André during the night, clearing the localities of the enemy. In a further counter-attack during the afternoon it was possible to re-occupy the farms Troteval and Beauvoir. Hill 72 continues to remain in enemy hands.

.....

At 1730 hrs General Eberbach gives orders to 2 SS Pz Corps to detach 9 SS Pz Div and despatch it to 1 SS Pz Corps sector, the formation to come under the command of 1 SS Pz Corps only in the event of its commitment.

*An interesting presentation of the 20th July plot is found in: Jan Colvin, Chief of Intelligence [Canaris], Victor Gollanz, London, 1951, pp. 196-202. The developments in the West in this connection have been described by Speidel, Invasion 1944, op cit, pp. 120-126. A short eye-witness account of the day's events at Hitler's Headquarters appears in General Heusinger's exceptionally well conceived and valuable volume: "Befehl im Widerstreit" [Command in Conflict], Rainer Wunderlich Verlag Herman Leins, Tübingen and Stuttgart, 1950.

Towards 1930 hrs, after strong artillery preparation, the enemy once more forces an entry into St. André and St. Martin. A battle group from 2 SS Pz Corps launches a counter-attack at once.....

(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, op cit, 21 Jul)

171. The prevailing bad flying weather was favouring the movements of the formations en route to the Panzer Group:

272 Inf Div	(less seven batteries) now in the combat zone of 1 SS Pz Corps.
326 Inf Div	greater part of the formation has crossed the River Seine.
116 Pz Div	Recce battalion and one panzer grenadier regiment have crossed the Seine, balance close to the eastern shore of the Seine.
363 Inf Div	leading elements have reached Rouen area.

(W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 21 Jul)

A Second Landing now less probable (21 Jul)

172. 'Foreign Armies West', which had been spinning for so long great tales about a forthcoming second major landing, was now beginning to express doubt in this regard:

"Considering all circumstances - - - [a second landing] is losing further in probability".

(Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West',
op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung
West, 21 Jul)

A perusal of the contemporary estimates gives the reader sometimes a weird feeling of unreality or of treason afoot. In Normandy the front was strained to the breaking point while not far away several hundred thousand men were standing idle. Whether Hitler was so certain of a second landing that he would not tolerate any different interpretation of the facts, whether the officers concerned failed to realize that the game was being won or lost in Normandy or whether they tried to hasten Hitler's downfall (like Admiral Canaris prior to his being made more or less innocuous in February 1944), cannot be told from the material on hand.

Fighting in St. Martin - St. André
Area (22 Jul)

22 Jul

173. According to the War Diary of Panzer Group West the days fighting was again centered on the St. Martin - St. André area:

The counter-attack suspended in the late evening hours of 21 Jul, on St. André and St. Martin, could only be carried forward as far as the southern outskirts of both places ...

Fierce fighting raged throughout the night around the farms Beauvoir and Hill 72. In the course of this fighting we were able to reestablish the old main battle lines...

After hard fighting we have succeeded in getting St. Martin back into our own hands towards noonday. St. André, however, could not be recaptured...

Enemy attacked in the late afternoon hours with infantry and tank forces in the Maltot area. He succeeds in making a break-in and in taking Maltot during the night. Counter-attack during the night by 2 SS Pz Corps brought no success, Maltot remaining in enemy hands.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 22 Jul)

174. The continuing unfavourable flying weather was a factor greatly favouring the approach march of 116 Pz Div. During the morning 116 Pz Recce Bn had reached the St. Sylvain area, 156 Pz Gren Regt (116 Pz Div) followed during the day. 555 GHQ Hy Arty Bn was placed under 1 SS Pz Corps, 503 Tiger Tk Bn moved from 86 Corps to 1 SS Pz Corps. 47 Pz Corps received orders to despatch 2 Pz Div with utmost speed to the area Moulins - Cesny - Acqueville - Tournebu east of the Orne in order to cope with the expected mass attack. First elements to arrive by the evening of 23 Jul (Ibid). The remnants of 16 GAF Div were to be reorganized rearwards of 21 Pz Div; 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs were to be disengaged and assembled in the river triangle between Laize and Orne (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 22 Jul). About one half of the captured Canadians were reported to be wearing a sort of protection for chest, abdomen and kidneys. (A Gp D, Intreps, op cit, Int.No. 5016/44, 23 Jul for 22 Jul)

175. As an aftermath to the attempt on Hitler's life, Col Gen Heinz Wilhelm Guderian on 22 Jul was made Acting Chief of the Army General Staff. He was to carry on at the same time with his former duties as Inspector General of Panzer Troops (OKH, Personnel Files, op cit, Guderian). An entry in Col Gen Jodl's Diary refers to a warning posted on that day in all prisoner of war camps to the effect that escapees would be shot. "Escaping was no longer a sport, but done at the peril of one's life." (Jodl, Diary Notes, op cit, 22 Jul)

23 Jul

176. Cloudy skies, scattered showers and a low ceiling seemed to be all that was preventing the Allied forces from launching the big attack. Local attacks on Hill 112 and south of Maltot were repulsed. 9 SS Pz Div had been relieved with 277 Inf Div and was now assembled in the Laize - Orne river triangle. 116 Pz Div reported its headquarters at Hill 62, SE Chateau de Compigny (south of Airan), 9 SS Pz Div at Ht Bosq (2 km west of Hainars) (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 23 Jul)

Dispositions of Panzer Group West
on 24 Jul

24 Jul

177. Several attacks in the area between Hill 112 and Bougy were repulsed during the night 23/24 Jul. On the whole the day was a quiet one, improving weather seemed to

make it possible for the big attack to be launched at any moment. As German headquarters were wont to do on the eve of an expected major attack, A Gp B, in the Daily Report set forth much detail information on dispositions, reserves and movements in the area of Panzer Group West. In the absence of contemporary German situation maps this source may have to be consulted in the future for items of specific interest; some of this information is quoted in the following:

711 Inf Div	A-Tk Bn NW Branville
346 Inf Div	Repl Bn 711 Inf Div E Bures
21 Pz Div	one bn 711 Inf Div on right wing of 21 Pz Div. One Pz Gr Regt, Fd Repl Bn, Tank Bn in area south of St. Samson - Rupierre
12 SS Pz Div	503 Tiger Tank Bn SW Moulton
116 Pz Div	two Pz Gren Regts, one tank Bn, A-Tk Bn, Recce Bn in area: Quatre Puits - Valmeray (excl) le Torp (excl) - St Sylvain (excl) - le Bu sur Rouvres (excl).
1 SS Pz Div	one Gren Bn SW Chicheboville, elts asslt gun bn, one gren bn Recce Bn, Engr Bn, plus 101 Hy Tank Bn South of Tilly la Campagne
272 Inf Div	one Tank Bn, one Pz Gren Bn of 2 Pz Div with one tank bn, one Pz Gren Bn of 9 SS Pz Div plus Recce Bn 10 SS Pz Div astride St Martin close behind main battle line.
2 Pz Div	Main part has reached assembly area Tournebu (excl) - Cingal (incl) - Court Genets (incl) - Donnay (excl)
10 SS Pz Div	committed: one regiment 271 Inf Div, one regiment 10 SS Pz Div, Recce Bn 9 SS Pz Div
	In Reserve in area south of Vieux: Pz Regt 10 SS Pz Div; one regt 271 Inf Div, 271 Engr Bn, 102 Hy Tank Bn, in the area of Peraux: one bn and Engr Bn 10 SS Pz Div
277 Inf Div	Engr Bn N Landes Fd Repl Bn S Hamara
276 Inf Div	Engr Bn 2 Pz Div N Epinay sur Odon
326 Inf Div	main part has relieved 2 Pz Div

Boundary Lines :

1 SS Pz Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps

Northern fringe Fresnay - le Vieux - le Val de Laize - along Orne to Chateau (east of Maltot) - e in Caen.

Headquarters:

346 Inf Div	Clermont
21 Pz Div	Mery-Corbon
16 GAF Div	Ste. Marie aux Anglais
12 SS Pz Div	Airan
116 Pz Div	Escures

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 24 Jul)

178. With 117,000 casualties recorded and 10,100 replacements received since the beginning of the invasion, and no improvement in sight, O.B. West saw no other solution but to extract replacements from his own reserve divisions. On 24 Jul he decided to dissolve 165 Inf Div and convert it into replacement transfer battalions; 157 and 189 Res Inf Divs were converted to Field Training Divisions, 158, 159 Inf Divs at first and 178 and 182 Res Inf thereafter were to be transformed into Infantry Divisions Type 1944. All this would free considerable numbers of men for replacement drafts. The infantry remnants of 16 GAF Div were to be distributed partly to 21 Pz Div and partly to the Infantry Division first to be converted to Type 1944. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 24 Jul)

Army Group B braced for Thrust towards Falaise (24 Jul)

179. In the section "Enemy Strength and Intentions" of A Gp B's Weekly Report, issued on 24 Jul for the week ending on 23 Jul, General Speidel for the first time discounted the probability of a second major landing at some distance from the scene of the original landings:

In the lodgment area the enemy has at least 40 divisions and numerous GHQ troops, he is continuing to bring in men and material.

In Great Britain there are still 52 large formations, of which 42 can be moved to the Continent.

The intentions of Army Group Montgomery seem to remain unchanged.

Second British Army will try to obtain a breakthrough in the general direction of Falaise in order to create the conditions required for a thrust to Paris.

...

There are no indications on hand regarding the date and target of First American Army Group's attack. In view of the continuing movement of forces to the Normandy front a far distant landing operation is becoming less probable, but Fifteenth Army's Somme - Seine sector is still especially endangered.

The more and the faster Montgomery is gaining ground from the bridgehead towards the South, the less probable becomes a landing on a new spot by the forces still in England.

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit,
Report 17-23 Jul, 24 Jul 44)

180. An agent had reported to 'Foreign Armies West' the transfer of Fourth British Army Headquarters from Scotland to the area north of Brighton. This Headquarters was to replace First Canadian Army Headquarters in the set-up of First American Army Group. Since nearly all definitely identified Canadian formations had been committed either in Italy or in Northern France, the staff of First Canadian Army Headquarters was now "presumably to be used for organizational and administrative tasks". (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Sitrep No. 1336, 24 Jul 44) Evidently German Intelligence at the time was still unaware of the fact that First Canadian Army Headquarters had taken over the extreme leftward sector of the Allied front in Normandy at 1200 hrs 23 Jul. (C.P. Stacey, The Canadian Army 1939-1945, King's Printer, Ottawa, 1948, p. 194)

181. General Eberbach has made some comments on Canadian fighting methods during the time between the fall of Caen and the Corps attack on 25 Jul:

Even though there was no major attack up to 26 Jul [25 Jul], not one day passed without minor enemy thrusts. The evening attacks, favoured by the Canadians, were particularly disagreeable.

They usually succeeded, by plentiful use of material, in "shooting" us out of a position and thereby effecting an advance of two or three kilometres. During daytime, we often succeeded in regaining the lost position by a quick counter-thrust. But, the situation was still too confused for counter-thrusts during the night, especially since the troops were furthermore no longer adequately trained. Thus, the Canadians had time to dig in during darkness and to organize the defence. Next morning they could only be driven back with losses which we could not afford.

Apart from the 380 mm shells of the "Rodney", the so-called "Schein-Granaten" (dummy shells) fired by the Canadians were very inconvenient. These glass shells exploded with the same detonation as ordinary grenades, but they had no effect. The enemy used these shells immediately before the assault, thus keeping the defensive forces under cover while the attacking troops could advance unharmed and surprise the defending forces before they were ready for combat.

(Eberbach Report, Transl. pp. 32-33)

Canadian Holding Attack (25 Jul)

25 Jul

182. The German right wing in Normandy had braced itself for a very heavy attack on 25 Jul, but what developed was merely a strong attack on a Corps front. Although the American attacks west of the Vire were of great weight, the Germans were not quite ready to conclude that they were being pinned down on the east flank for the benefit of the Allied forces further west. In the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army the day's events were reflected by the following entries:

25 Jul After the enemy had laid down intense drumfire since 0230 hrs on the left flank of 1 SS Pz Div and the sector of 272 Inf Div, an attack was begun at 0520 hrs with infantry in these sectors. Two penetrations around Tilly were cleaned up immediately. May, which had been lost, was recaptured by evening in a counter-attack. The enemy remained quiet on the rest of the front.

Today's attack on the left flank of 1 SS Pz Corps can not yet be evaluated as a major attack in the bridgehead, east of the Orne.

0845 hrs Field Marshal von Kluge has the C. of S. orient him on the situation, Pz Gp takes the view that the attack begun this morning against 1 SS Pz Corps is not the anticipated major attack, as in the first place the enemy air arm has not yet appeared in sizeable dimensions. O.B. West shares this view.

In a second conversation, Field Marshal von Kluge directs attention to the ensuring of the reserves being held ready for an immediate counter-attack as an absolute *sine qua non*. Under no circumstances must there be any delay.

2130 hrs Tel con between O.B. West and O.B. Pz Gp. O.B. West declares his agreement with the withdrawal of 272 Inf Div from 1 SS Pz Corps as proposed by 1 SS Pz Corps on account of the heavy losses.

2225 hrs C. of S. informs C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps that the withdrawal of 272 Inf Div and moving up of 9 SS Pz Div to the area hitherto occupied by 272 Inf Div is approved. The balance of 2 Pz Div will be moved during the night to the new area of 2 Pz Div. The Div will be brought under command of 1 SS Pz Corps, effective immediately.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 25 Jul)

183. According to A Gp B's evening report at 1900 hrs, the enemy penetration in the area of 1 SS Pz Corps had reached a width of 5 km and a depth of 1 - 3 km. Since 1700 hrs elements of 9 SS Pz Div were engaged in a counter-attack along both sides of the road Bretteville - Fontenay, the attack was being supported by concentrated fire from 2 SS Pz Corps artillery, assault tanks and tiger tank guns on the west bank of the Orne. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 25 Jul). 74 Corps Headquarters (at Guingamp, Brittany) received orders for moving to Pz Gp West to take command there of the newly committed infantry divisions and thus free one Panzer Corps Headquarters in the area for taking command over the disengaged panzer divisions. (Ibid)

184. May-sur-Orne had been retaken by units of 272 Inf Div. 9 SS Pz Div's counter-attack was stopped on Hill 88 by heavy anti-tank fire. The forces involved were regrouped and bitter fighting continued. 271 Inf Div had taken over the extreme right sector of 2 SS Pz Corps; the right divisional boundary was the old Corps boundary, the left one: multiple road junction Fontaine - road bend -

500 m NE Hill 112 - road fork SE Vierville - Amaye (271 Inf Div) - course of river Orne to bend NE Thury-Harcourt - Esson (10 SS Pz Div). Corps Headquarters 1 SS Pz Corps was now 1.5 km E Potigny. 116 Pz Div was almost completely north of Falaise. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 25 Jul). 2 Cdn Inf Div had been identified at Verrieres, 3 Cdn Inf Div at Tilly-la-Campagne. The day's attack had been carried out by 2 Cdn Corps, the British formations, particularly the large armoured forces believed to be located along the road Caen - Lisieux, had remained uncommitted. (A Gp D, Intreps, op cit, Int No. 5133/44, 25 Jul (for 25 Jul)).

26 Jul

185 Between Tilly-la-Campagne and the Orne the Germans had on the whole regained their former lines; the exception was Verrieres, which fell to the Canadians after hard fighting:

"Despite the most intense enemy opposition, the formations of 1 SS Pz Corps thrown in between Tilly and the Orne succeeded during the night 25/26 Jul in restoring the former main battle line. Apart from somewhat feeble thrusts in the area of the 1 SS Pz Corps and a stronger attack upon Verrieres, the enemy remained quiet during the whole day. He succeeded in forcing an entry into Verrieres, pushing back our Grenadiers to the southern fringe of the locality. During a telephone conversation with C. of S. Marshal von Kluge had high praise for 1 SS Pz Corps' fighting yesterday. C. of S. outlines O.B.'s probable intentions for offensive operations within the present area of 21 Pz Div. 2 Pz Div, 21 Pz Div and 116 Pz Div to participate. Field Marshal von Kluge is very sceptical and has no faith in success but agrees to a plan of attack being made and submitted to him. Pz Gp orders relief of 21 Pz Div by 272 Inf Div. After being relieved 21 Pz Div transfers to the area Maizieres - Vendevre - Bernieres - Soulangy - Oully and will there be brought under direct command of Pz Gp West."

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 26 Jul)

Von Kluge believes Allies intend pivoting on Caen to establish a line Falaise - Domfront - Fougères. Infantry Formations of Fifteenth Army might have to be committed in Normandy (26 Jul)

186. By now Marshal von Kluge had of course every reason to be sceptical about schemes for offensive operations in Normandy. In the Caen - Falaise sector the situation was more or less under control, but at the northern front of Seventh Army the situation had deteriorated to the point where he had just been authorizing a withdrawal movement. Long before this he had ceased to see the situation in the light of his Berchtesgaden briefings. On 26 Jul he had recorded at some length his own reflections on the future course of events in Normandy. In summation, the somewhat obtrusely styled entry reveals the following train of thoughts:

The events of the recent past have shown ever more clearly the enemy's intention of wearing down and destroying our forces by means of incessant sector attacks.

Subsequently pivoting on Caen, he intends to reach open ground in the general direction Falaise - Domfront - Fougères.

Counter measures have failed to keep the front from being forced back. Casualties are high; quick replacements for men and material unavailable.

The possibility exists of his planning to hasten the development for political or military-political reasons by dropping parachute divisions behind the front, possibly in conjunction with a simultaneous invasion of Fifteenth Army's area or at St. Malo Bay.

To hold Normandy remains the decisive factor.

This can only be done if we are capable of tackling and destroying an enemy who has:

- (a) either broken through the front after it has been bled white;
- (b) or descended from the air behind the front;
- (c) or carried out outflanking landings.

It is imperative, therefore, to place a group of forces at the tendon line of Normandy. It must comprise at least three infantry divisions and one panzer division.

Nothing will be forthcoming from other theatres of war or from the Reich.

The required divisions must therefore be taken from the other fronts of O.B. West, namely:

either from Fifteenth Army (when an attack by the American forces still in England has become improbable).

or from other fronts, which are in any event too weak to withstand a major attack.

The measures to be taken in consequence are now under consideration.

(W.D. A Gp D, op cit, pp. 288-289, 26 Jul)

In other words, Marshal von Kluge was now making up his mind to draw on the infantry divisions of Fifteenth Army.

27 Jul

187. In the area of Panzer Group West contention for the Verrieres position was continuing, but the actual fighting east of the Orne was at the moment of infinitesimal significance compared to the ominous developments in the area of Seventh Army. For whilst the hinge of the door to Paris was being held by strong forces, the door itself was being pushed open. Early in the morning Marshal von Kluge left La Roche Guyon for

the headquarters of Seventh Army. On the way he called at the headquarters of Pz Gp West "to make certain that all arrangements had been made for a speedy transfer of 2 Pz Div to Seventh Army"* (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 27 Jul). Later in the morning, O.B. West was with the Commander of Seventh Army. The situation at St. Lô was obviously deteriorating. At 1010 hours he gave orders for the immediate transfer of 2 Pz Div to Seventh Army (2 Para Corps). In addition the headquarters staff of 47 Pz Corps was to move forthwith to Seventh Army and conduct the counter-attack from south of St. Lô. There was no time to await the arrival of H.Q. 58 Corps from the south of France. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 27 Jul) The gap created by the departure of 2 Pz Div was to be filled by 21 Pz Div moving in from 86 Corps area. A further shift in weight was initiated during the day when 116 Pz Div was ordered to move to Seventh Army's Vire - St. Sever area. In the Army Group D War Diary this fact was briefly mentioned on 27 Jul (Ibid). Pz Gp West was informed accordingly by telephone at 1015 hrs 28 Jul (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, op cit, 28 Jul).

188. At 1530 hrs OKW informed A Gp D that the Fuehrer had granted O.B. West's request for permission to transfer 9 Pz Div to the Normandy front. Orders were issued immediately for the quick transfer to Normandy over two railroad lines of 9 Pz Div from the Avignon - Nimes - Arles area, where the division was at the time in the reserve of Army Group G. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 27 Jul, p. 294)

189. During the afternoon the Inspector General of Pz Tps informed the Panzer Group that it was being upgraded to a Panzer Army (see para 225 below). At the same time he announced the forthcoming despatch to the Panzer Group by priority trains of one hundred 7.5 cm A-Tk guns, 34 tanks Mark IV, 24 Tanks Mark V and some panzer grenadier replacement battalions. In the evening Gen Inf Straube, Cmdr 74 Pz Corps reported by telephone that he and a portion of his staff had reached the old command post of 47 Pz Corps and would be ready to assume command in the morning of 28 Jul. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, op cit, 27 Jul)

A Second Landing no longer expected.
Fifteenth Army's Infantry Formations
begin moving to Normandy (27 Jul)

190. O.B. West was now convinced that no further landings would be forthcoming elsewhere and that all other fronts would have to be denuded ruthlessly in favour of the forces in Normandy. He asked OKW for permission to move in forthwith:

84 Inf Div and 331 Inf Div	from Fifteenth Army
708 Inf Div	from First Army
242 Inf Div	from Nineteenth Army

OKW replied by telephone: *

Fuehrer frees 84 or 89 Inf Div for
commitment in Normandy, decision on
balance of requests on 28 Jul

(W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 27 Jul)

*This implies that a warning order had been given to the Panzer Group; if so, however, the fact was not recorded in their War Diary.

Old Misconceptions on Canadian Order of
Battle rectified (27 Jul)

191. 'Foreign Armies West' had been gradually retreating from the position that a second landing was a foregone conclusion. In line with the general and belated re-appraisal of the situation, the section was now explaining at length why there would be no second landing. (Sitreps, 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, Appx to Sitrep No. 1339, 27 Jul). On the same day, in the manner of financial institutions releasing bad news at a moment when they are sure to be overshadowed by worse news, the section disposed of another embarrassing matter. In addition to the Canadian divisions actually in England, they had consistently mentioned from two to five additional Canadian or "believed to be Canadian" divisions in England. (Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 40, para 52f). But on 27 Jul they reported:

One Canadian infantry division of unknown number (Code Number 952) as well as two Canadian armoured divisions of unknown number (Code Numbers 1051 and 1052), on the basis of shipping reports transferred from Canada to Great Britain in 1943, so far could not be identified in Great Britain. These transfers, which had been reported by a reliable source, were probably not despatches of entire formations but rather fairly large shipments of reinforcements. In the future these three divisions will therefore again be presumed to be in Canada.

(Sitreps, 'Foreign Armies West',
op cit, Sitrep No. 1339, 27 Jul)

Evidently the Germans were not well posted on Canadian Serial Numbers, for:

Serial 952 was 21st Armoured Regiment, C.A.C.,
Serial 1051 was 4th Medium Regiment, R.C.A., and
Serial 1052 was 1st Bn The Algonquin Regiment, C.I.C.

IMBALANCE OF GERMAN DISPOSITIONS SPELLS
DISASTER (28 JUL - 21 AUG)

Seventh Army in precarious Position (28 Jul)

192. East of the Orne there was little fighting, but in the area of Seventh Army the situation was grave and O.B. West ordered the immediate departure of 116 Pz Div to Seventh Army. This meant that within two days Panzer Group West had been deprived of 280 tanks, however, in view of the situation there was no other choice but to accept the added risk in the area south of Caen. 9 Pz Div would be in transit for at least 8 days, and thus would be too late for the imminent showdown. With the consent of OKW the division was given orders to join Fifth Panzer Army as a replacement for 116 Pz Div. Permission was received from OKW to bring in 331 and 708 Inf Divs, but 242 Inf Div was to remain with Nineteenth Army (para 190 above). 84 Inf Div was to join Fifth Panzer Army as quickly as possible. Headquarters 74 Corps (with 276 and 326 Inf Divs under command) took over command in the sector from the rear party of 47 Pz Corps headquarters staff (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 28 Jul).

193. By 1800 hrs the last elements of 116 Pz Div were on the march to Seventh Army. 272 Inf Div had taken over 21 Pz Div's old sector, 21 Pz Div was on the move to the area Bretteville - Fresnay - Le Moutiers - Barbery. 503 GHQ Hy Tk Bn moved to Le Moutiers (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 28 Jul). During the day Seventh Army had given orders for a withdrawal that was regarded as hasty and ill-advised by Marshal von Kluge. With the concurrence of OKW, Seventh Army's Chief of Staff, Lt Gen Max Fensel, was replaced by Colonel Freiherr Rudolf von Gersdorff, G.S.C., until then C. of S. 82 Corps in the Pas de Calais area (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 28 Jul; for details see: O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS-A 894, Normandy, Cobra and Mortain, answers to questions submitted to Maj Gen Frhr von Gersdorff, C. of S. Seventh Army) (Photostat 981SOM(D118)) At the same time General von Choltitz was replaced in the command of 84 Corps by Lt Gen Otto Efeldt (Ibid, et al)

29 Jul

194. South of Caen the lull in fighting continued, but Allied concentrations observed near Verrieres, opposite 9 SS Pz Div, as well as increasing artillery activity were taken for signs pointing to an early resumption of the attack (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 29 Jul). 'Foreign Armies West' cited the (now recognized) commitment in Normandy of First Canadian Army Headquarters as further proof of the operations there being of absolutely focal character (Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, Appx to Sitrep No. 1341, 29 Jul). The appearance in Normandy of additional higher command staffs and formations (amongst others 4 Cdn Armd Div) were indicative of plans for vast operations to be developed from the Normandy base. (Ibid, Sitrep No. 1341)

Critical Situation at Avranches (30 Jul)

30 Jul

195. At the western extremity of the Normandy front the situation was critical. Avranches was about to fall, there were no reserves in sight with which to oppose an

American break into "the open". The attack had spread to the left wing of Pz Gp West. Obviously the British meant to advance in contact with the Americans and compel the Germans to withdraw additional formations from the area south of Caen. No doubt well aware that only quick major withdrawals could save the two Armies from destruction, Marshal von Kluge renewed his insistent demands for either Keitel, Jodl or Warlimont joining him at his headquarters to get a clear picture of the situation (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 30 Jul).

196. In the area of Pz Gp West fighting during the day was confined to the sector of 74 Corps. 276 Inf Div, on the whole, was able to hold on to its positions, but 326 Inf Div, which bore the brunt of the fighting, was dislodged from Cahagnes and La Ferriere (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 30 Jul). 21 Pz Div, since the night 28/29 Jul in the Bretteville - Fresnay - Le Moutiers - Barbery area (para 193 above), was rushed to the support of 74 Corps; Battle Group von Oppeln, composed of the Division's Tank Regt (22 Pz Regt), two panzer grenadier battalions and two batteries (self propelled), plus 503 GHQ Hy Tk Bn reached the 74 Corps area late in the afternoon; shortly before midnight the balance of the Division received orders to move immediately to the area Le Mesnil - Anzouf, where further orders would be received from 74 Corps. (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, 30 Jul). 21 Pz Div was expected to restore and hold the line Orbois - Anctoville - Cahagnes - la Ferriere - Dampierre - Bellay (Daily Sitreps, A Gp B, 30 Jul). As far as the troop movements were concerned, the last elements of 326 Inf Div and 363 Inf Div had now reached the south shore of the Seine, and the ferrying-over of 84 Inf Div was well under way. (Ibid)

American Breakthrough at Avranches. "Fuehrer looking for new O.B. West" (31 Jul)

31 Jul

197. At the extreme western end of the Normandy front the situation had become desperate. The Americans had taken Avranches and the bridge of Pontaubault; the next phase would be mobile warfare on a grand scale. On 30 Jul Jodl had submitted to Hitler a draft-order for withdrawal from the coastal front, and on 31 Jul Hitler seemed inclined to consider such a measure. At the same time his personal reaction to the unfavourable turn of events was the usual one, Jodl noting in his diary "Fuehrer looking for new O.B. West". (Jodl, Diary Notes, op cit, p. 35, 31 Jul)

198. East of the Orne the day was uneventful, but fighting might flare up at any moment:

The unusually strong concentration of artillery (120-130 recognized batteries) in the area Caen-Giberville-Cormelles-Fleury sur Orne confirms the pronounced build up east of the Orne...

(A Gp D, Intreps, op cit, Int No. 5285/44, 31 Jul for 31 Jul)

On the western wing of the Panzer Group heavy fighting continued, 326 Inf Div lost further ground, 21 Pz Div's counterattacks failed to restore the situation but prevented a complete collapse of the sector-front. 276 Inf Div was taken back somewhat in order to adjust and shorten the front line. (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 31 Jul)

199. During the day, 84 Inf Div, then en route to Pz Gp West, was redirected to the Condé-Flers area of Seventh Army. Since the divisions in the reserve of Pz Gp West had moved westward, the Group was almost devoid of reserves; to compensate it for the non-arrival of 84 Inf Div, 89 Inf Div was alerted for immediate transfer from the Rouen-Le Havre sector to the Bretteville area south of Caen.* (W.D. A Gp D, op cit, 31 Jul)(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Apps, Appx 237, A Gp B, Ops No 5356/44)

1 Aug

200. In the area of Pontaubault (south of Avranches) the weak German forces were withdrawing towards the South and Southwest and the way to the South and Southeast was laid open for the American forces. On the extreme left wing of Pz Gp West the withdrawal of 277 and 276 Inf Divs had been carried out as planned, but 326 Inf Div was being speeded on its way by British armour and its commander (Lt Gen von Drabich-Waechter) had been killed. 21 PZ Div was unable to deliver a counterblow and 74 Corps reported its inability to restore the situation with the forces on hand. With Le Beny-Bocage now in British hands and American tanks roaming freely between Avranches and Rennes the spectre of an envelopment of Seventh Army seemed to appear on the horizon and closing the gap south of Caumont was imperative. It was decided therefore to carry out the following rearrangements. During the night 1/2 Aug H.Q. 2 SS Pz Corps, with all Corps troops and with 10 and 9 SS Pz Divs would move to the gap to offer resistance there to the strong British concentration of armour and to re-establish contact with 2 Para Corps (Seventh Army). 21 Pz Div also to be under 2 SS Pz Corps; only 276 and 326 Inf Divs to remain under 74 Corps; H.Q. 58 Corps to take over command in the former area of H.Q. 2 SS Pz Corps. (G.M.D.S.-75144/25, W.D. A Gp D, 1-31 Aug 44, 1 Aug) (981CW(D32))

Belated Rush to strengthen left Wing of Seventh Army (1 Aug). Eberbach suggests general Withdrawal to Seine (1 Aug)

201. En route to the torn and bleeding flanks of Seventh Army were now:

84 Inf Div
363 Inf Div
708 Inf Div
2 Para Div**
and 9 Pz Div.

This was not enough. Even more might be too little and too

*89 Inf Div had been transferred from Norway to France (Fifteenth Army area) during the latter part of June. (W.D. Fifteenth Army, op cit, passim)

**At 0230 hrs 1 Aug OKW had given permission to move in 2 Para Div, but refused to countenance the suggested withdrawal of one regiment from reinforced 319 Inf Div's forces on the Channel Islands. (Ibid).

late. In consequence O.B. West gave orders for 85 Inf Div*, 89 Inf Div and 331 Inf Div to be moved to the front (Ibid). In the evening Eberbach told Speidel he thought it necessary that new and important decisions be made. The attack on the left wing of the Panzer Group would only be held up but not stopped indefinitely by the three Panzer Divisions brought in. He was thinking of the Seine river as a new line of defence. Speidel promised to notify O.B. West of this without delay. (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, 1 Aug)

202. 'Foreign Armies West' recorded confirmation from reliable sources of Headquarters First Canadian Army being in command of the front on both sides of the Orne, on the western side to about 1 km SW Baron. (Foreign Armies West, Sitreps, op cit, 1 Aug). Army Group D's Intelligence Report for 1 Aug mentioned the concentration of British armour at the west wing of British Second Army. Three armoured divisions had been moved in from east of the Orne, they might be under an Armoured Corps Headquarters, according to captured documents they might intend reaching Falaise via Vassy and Conde sur Noireau. But according to other indications the probability of a forthcoming attack east of the Orne was not to be discounted. (A Gp D, Intreps, op cit, lc No. 5305/44, 0200 hrs 2 Aug for 1 Aug 44)

2 Aug

Re-alignment of Panzer Group West (2 Aug)

203. British Second Army's shift in weight to the western wing has been answered by re-aligning the Panzer Group from east to west as follows:

86 Corps
1 SS Pz Corps
58 Corps
74 Corps
2 SS Pz Corps

Further West was Seventh Army with:

2 Para Corps
47 Pz Corps
84 Corps

The German forces in Brittany had been virtually cut off from Seventh Army, and 25 Corps in consequence was made responsible for the defence of the peninsula in direct subordination to A Gp B. To lead the forces assembling south of 84 Corps (9 Pz Div, 708 Inf Div, and others to come), Headquarters 81 Corps was directed to move from Rouen to that area (W.D. A Gp D, August 1944, op cit, 2 Aug)

*For the right wing of Pz Gp West, which had been deprived of all existing and promised reserves. (Ibid) To obtain permission for removing 85 Inf Div from Fifteenth Army's area von Kluge had to promise exchanging it for a tired division from the central zone. He did so with the mental reservation: "in due course". (Ibid)

British Drive on Vire might drive Wedge between Panzer Group and Seventh Army (2 Aug)

204. On the right and centre of the Panzer Group the day was uneventful, on the left wing the situation was stabilized to some extent by 2 SS Pz Corps. Advancing from Le Beny-Bocage the British forces had nevertheless come close to Vire. Seventh Army was falling back to the line Carville - NW St. Sever - Fontenaymont - Le Gât. 2 SS Pz Corps had not yet been able to establish contact with Seventh Army; a new attempt was to be made on 3 Aug. British Second Army seemed to aim at separating the two German Armies. A thrust from south of Caen towards Falaise might occur at any time. American First Army apparently intended sealing off Brittany and throwing its main weight towards the Southeast. (Daily Sitreps A Gp B, 2 Aug)

Hitler demands an armoured Thrust in the Direction of Avranches (2 Aug) - Von Kluge's Opinion not wanted

205. For days von Kluge had been seeking the opportunity to explain the situation and its implications in a personal conversation with some highly placed personality. But Hitler was bent less on hearing what the Marshal had to say than on telling him what to do. At 2330 hrs 2 Aug von Kluge received the Fuehrer's orders for the further conduct of the operations in Normandy. While the War Diary of Army Group D does not contain an entry indicating that this order was transmitted by General Warlimont in person, his presence at several conferences held in Normandy on 3 Aug (para 207 below) seems to make this probable. The purport of the Fuehrer's order was not recorded in the War Diary; von Kluge merely stated darkly: "O.B. West will inform OKW personally of his own estimate and intentions". There is no doubt, however, that Hitler had decided to cure the situation in his own way. Schramm writes:

(2 Aug) ... O.B. West was now directed to parry the breakthrough with a counter-attack of strong armoured forces. To this end the mobile formations still committed were to be relieved with infantry divisions. The infantry divisions on the approach march were to be directed to the area between Orne and Vire where the front was to be held mainly by infantry.... In this manner at least four armoured divisions were to be made available for a thrust to the coast at Avranches.

(Schramm, Der Westen, p. 79)

3 Aug

Limited Withdrawal of Panzer Group West to free Armour and straighten Lines (3 Aug)

206. In accordance with the orders received O.B. West instructed Seventh Army to make preparations for an attack to regain Avranches and destroy the enemy between Mortain and Avranches. The threat to Brittany was a risk that had to be accepted. The outcome of the thrust to Avranches would decide the Battle of Normandy (W.D. A Gp D, 3 Aug). The situation on the left wing of the Panzer Group was still critical but the timely arrival of 2 SS Pz Corps had halted what might have turned into an attempt to encircle Seventh Army. As a result of Seventh Army's withdrawal, 2 Pz Div was now free for a mobile task (Ibid). For the same purpose 1 SS Pz Div was to be relieved by 89 Inf Div and assembled in the area north

of Falaise for transfer to Seventh Army. To trade space for strength and harmonize the lines of the two Armies in accordance with the latest developments at the right wing of Seventh Army, Army Group B ordered a withdrawal of the Panzer Group's forces west of the Orne in two successive bounds to the following lines:

First movement (night 3/4 Aug)

To St. André - Orne bend at Moulin d'Anger - northern outskirts Breaux-Beaucage - northern rim Montigny - northern fringe Nidalos - Canteloup - le Val - Pied du Bois (2km SW Aunay) - southern outskirts la Ferrière Duval - southern outskirts Montchauvet - northern outskirts Montchamp - northern outskirts le Désert (here junction with 2 Para Corps);

Second Movement (night 4/5 Aug)

To east bank of Orne north of and close to Thury-Harcourt - south bank of creek as far as Roucamps-la Tourpinière - le Huan - "St" in St. Jean le Blanc - northern outskirts Lassy - south shore of Allière south of Bresles (here junction with 2 Para Corps).

Battleworthy rearguards to remain in contact with the enemy but under pressure to withdraw to the new lines.

New boundary lines:

1 SS Pz Corps and 74 Corps

Orne (on and after 5 Aug)

74 Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps

eastern fringe aux Cerfs (west of Ondefontaine) - Moulin de la Ferrière - bridge 3 km west of St. Jean - la Moissonière - northeastern rim of Pontecoulant

2 SS Pz Corps and 2 Para Corps (Seventh Army)

western rim Carville - church Presles - northeastern rim Flers.

Headquarters 58 Corps to be available for transfer to Seventh Army from 5 Aug onwards.

(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 251, Eberbach, Ops No. 730/44, 3 Aug 44)

207. 344 Inf Div (on coast defence duty in the Berck area north of Abbeville) was alerted for transfer to the combat zone south of the Seine. The approach march of 84 Inf Div, 363 Inf Div and 394 Asslt Gun Bde was proceeding as planned (W.D. A Gp D, 3 Aug). During the day General Warlimont appeared at the command post of Panzer Group West for a conference with General Eberbach and his top aides and commanders:

On 3 Aug Gen-Arty Warlimont from OKW paid us a visit. We described our situation to him with complete candour and frankness. We suggested a retreat to the Seine as the only possible solution. He answered that Hitler would never accept that. He was unable to give us an objective or hope for a positive solution. Those at the top expected everything from the counterthrust of Seventh Army to Avranches which we considered as hopeless.

(Eberbach, Report, Transl, pp. 41-42)

Warlimont - Eberbach Conversation. Eberbach's Warning unheeded (3 Aug)

208. How careful German generals had learned to be in discussing matters unpalatable to the Fuehrer, and how pathetically futile were Warlimont's arguments at this conference emerges from the recorded portion of the conversation. General Eberbach had described the situation of the Panzer Group, stressing in particular the antediluvian anti-tank equipment of the infantry divisions and the limited supply of ammunition:

Warlimont:	Production is steadily increasing, but at the moment everything is needed in the East.
Eberbach:	If seems that ultimately the situation of the two Armies will become untenable.
Warlimont:	But you have been able to hold on until now. If you can do this for another month or two, this summer's fighting will not have been in vain. The British people have been assured that the war will end this year. If this fails to happen, there exists for us one more great opportunity (serious effects of V1 on morale).
Eberbach:	The situation of Seventh Army makes it necessary to arrive at a big decision.
Warlimont:	If the Normandy front in its extent of 120 km cannot be held, it will certainly not be feasible further back (Seine - Marne - West Wall). It is also out of the question because no supply arrangements have been made there. It is necessary to withdraw now from the zone of Panzer Army West four panzer divisions for a thrust to Avranches and to cut off the Americans.

Dietrich: If the SS divisions are pulled out south of Caen the enemy will attack there and break through.

Warlimont: However, the SS divisions are not in their proper place there; they are employed in an immobile role and not at the focal point of the enemy's effort.

Eberbach: The infantry divisions now approaching will be committed there as soon as possible, but the SS divisions must be held ready in the rear to support the front. The main question remains how the front can be held in the long run against an enemy so far superior in materiel.

Warlimont: Two SS brigades can be moved in from Denmark; the homeland and occupied France are being combed through for all available material.

Eberbach: Moving in the SS brigades will take from eight to ten days; that is too long. Pulling out the SS divisions and launching them in the direction of Avranches takes at least three to four days. And we do not know what the situation then will be there.

Warlimont: The enemy has now his first great success. He is now attaining that which he had set as the objective [to be reached] within the first few days of the invasion. Within a measurable period the commitment of completely new weapons will have its effect. Here too the culprits of 20 Jul have caused delay. But one may count on it that everything will move faster from now on. The first thousand of new fighter planes will be brought into action in the second half of August. There will be hope then of breaking the enemy's complete supremacy in the air.

Eberbach: But there still remains the question whether the situation in the Seventh Army area can ever be restored again.

Warlimont: At the present moment five divisions are en route [to Normandy], and the coasts are to be depleted further.

..... (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 248, Memo: Notes on Warlimont Meeting, 3 Aug 44)

Work on Atlantic Wall halted (4 Aug)

4 Aug

209. The first phase of the Panzer Group's withdrawal (para 206 above) had been carried out as planned. 9 and 10

SS Pz Divs were engaged in heavy fighting northeast of Vire. 9 SS Pz Div had established contact with 3 Para Div (Seventh Army) at point 119. Mortain had been retaken by the Germans in the evening of 3 Aug and was lost again on 4 Aug. From Rennes enemy armour was moving to the West and Southwest. The assembly of the German armour for the thrust toward Rennes was under way, but it would be impossible to launch the undertaking before the night 6/7 Aug. The Advanced Headquarters of Seventh Army was now at La Selle la Forge (SE Flers). (Daily Sitreps A Gp B, 4 Aug)

210. In the area of Pz Gp West 12 SS Pz Div was being relieved by 272 Inf Div, in the area of Seventh Army 2 Pz Div, 116 Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Div would be pulled out during the night 4/5 Aug. 331 Inf Div (in process of crossing the Seine) was to join Seventh Army; 668 GHQ Hy A tk Bn, hitherto with Pz Gp West, was also directed to Seventh Army. With 2 SS Pz Corps pinned down near Vire, and the other armoured formations almost equally indispensable in their present locations, the task of marshalling the forces for the thrust to Avranches was difficult and almost certain to require quick 'on the spot' decisions. Marshal von Kluge, therefore, spent the day with Hausser at the Advanced Headquarters of Seventh Army. General Warlimont was at the Main Headquarters of Seventh Army. Arrangements were made by O.B. West for a full dress conference at La Roche Guyon on the next day for the purpose of supplying Warlimont with all the data required for the Fuehrer's information. The Conference was to be attended by the Chiefs of Staff of Army Groups D and B, the Naval and Air Commanders in France, their Chiefs of Staff, and the Military Governor of France.* OKW issued orders to halt work on the Atlantic Wall and commence preparing defence lines in the interior of France. (W.D. A Gp D, 4 Aug 44)

2 SS Pz Corps pinned down, not immediately available for projected Attack (5 Aug)

5 Aug

211. Local attacks on both sides of the Caen-Falaise road were repulsed by the Germans. 12 SS Pz Div had been relieved by 272 Inf Div and assembled further south, east of the Caen-Falaise road. 1 SS Pz Div was being pulled out during the day; the first two battalions had been relieved by the leading elements of incoming 89 Inf Div during the night 4/5 Aug; 1056 Inf Regt, 89 A tk Bn and 3 Bn 189 Arty Regt (all of 89 Inf Div) moved into the line during the day; most other units of the division had reached the area 10-14 km north of Falaise (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 5 Aug). C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps asked in vain for permission to leave the Panther Battalion of 1 SS Pz Div in its present location. He was told the risk in that sector would have to be accepted, 1 SS Pz Div (less rear units) was to move at once to the Tinchebray - St. Cormier - Flers area (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, 5 Aug). Pressure at the inter-army boundary was making 2 SS Pz Corps' early participation in the planned attack improbable. In the area of Seventh Army a complete disengagement of 2 Pz Div and 116 Pz

*There are no entries to show whether the conference was held or not. It seems probable that more urgent matters had demanded the presence of all concerned at their command posts.

Div had not yet been possible. During the night 5/6 Aug 116 Pz Div was to be relieved by 84 Inf Div. In the meantime 85 Inf had begun traversing the Seine; 331 Inf Divs crossings were well under way. In view of the almost complete depletion of reserves, 344 Inf Div (para 207 above) was directed to join Pz Gp West with all possible despatch. Advance elements of 708 Inf Div had reached the general line Laval - Loué - SW Le Mans, 9 Pz Div was being concentrated between Domfront and Alençon. (Ibid)

212. Late in the evening OKW informed A Gp D of 'Foreign Armies West's' appreciation of the Western situation in the sense that an imminent threat to the French south coast seemed no longer to exist.* O.B. West was to give consideration to possible withdrawals from that coast. O.B. West noted that he had considered this question repeatedly and had asked for the transfer of 11 Pz Div and 242 Inf Div to the northern area, but had met with constant refusals. The fate of the campaign was being decided in Northern France; if an attack on the South of France was clearly no longer to be expected he wanted 11 Pz Div above all, and at least two or better still three infantry divisions. (W.D. A Gp D, 5 Aug)

6 Aug

213. In the area of the Panzer Group the day was one of local attacks along the whole front west of the Orne. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 6 Aug). In the sector of 1 SS Pz Corps artillery activity increased during the afternoon, in the evening the opponent began firing smoke-shells on the Grimbois - Thury-Harcourt area and undertook local assaults on La Hogue and south of Verrières. The situation was interpreted in the sense that enemy attacks were to be expected in the next few days against the entire front of 1 SS Pz Corps, 74 Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Daily Report 6 Aug 44). 10 Cdn Inf Bde had been identified at La Hogue. It was thought to be a component of what the Germans at the time believed to be 4 Cdn Inf Div (A Gp D, Daily Intreps, op cit, Int No. 5451/44, 6 Aug).

Situation forces von Kluge to launch ill-prepared Attack without Delay (6 Aug)

214. Headquarters 89 Inf Div were near the creek 1.5 km west of St. Germain le Vasson. The division had taken over the sector from 1 SS Pz Div at 2130 hrs 5 Aug. The combat elements of the Division were virtually complete in the sector by the evening of 6 Aug. 1344 Aslt Gun Bn had also reached the area and was placed under 89 Inf Div (Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Report for 6 Jun 44). In the reserve of 1 SS Pz Corps were: 12 SS Pz Div, 101 Hy Tk Bn and two battalions of 89 Inf Div (Ibid). 12 SS Pz Div was being shifted to the area south of Bretteville-sur-Laize. Headquarters 271 Inf Div were at Le Mesnil (east of

*Allied forces landed in Southern France on 15 Aug. It is possible that 'Foreign Armies West' was led astray by Allied deceptive measures, but the balance of the text gives rise to the suspicion that the whole thing was an added bit of sabotage. (For text see: Sitreps 'Foreign Armies West', op cit, Kurze Feindbeurteilung West, Appx to Sitrep No. 1347, 4 Aug 44)

Tournebu). 85 Inf Div and 331 Inf Div were still engaged in crossing the Seine; advance elements of 344 Inf Div were rolling west. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 6 Aug). 6 Para Div (near Abbeville) was directed to join the forces south of the Seine. (W.D. A Gp D, 6 Aug).

215. Seventh Army was hard pressed; penetrations at and west of Vire could not be eliminated; Allied armour was advancing on Mayenne and Laval. There was no time for proper preparations of the planned attack, the picture was changing constantly, it was hard to tell which formations were definitely available and which ones had been pinned down again. During the late afternoon OKW was almost constantly on the telephone demanding a clear picture of the situation, insisting on being informed of the exact composition of the forces to be committed, demanding full information on O.B. West's intentions and complicating the situation by demanding the immediate replacement of distrusted General Funck (47 Pz Corps) by General Eberbach. It was too late to change commanders for the attack now being launched, but the matter was brought to a head a few days later (para 231 below). During the day the situation deteriorated to the point where Marshal von Kluge felt the attack had to be launched now or never:

Enemy signals dealing with our recognized intentions, discernible enemy regroupings and the pressure of superior forces on the critically distended front of Seventh Army forced the launching of the attack which could no longer be postponed. At 2000 hrs 116 Pz Div, 2 Pz Div, 2 SS Pz Div and elements of 9 Pz Div [not 9 SS Pz Div] launched the thrust towards Avranches from the area east and north of Mortain. 1 SS Pz Div following up as quickly as possible.

(A Gp B, Sitreps, op cit, Ops No. 5680/44, issued 0100 hrs 7 Aug for Sit 6 Aug)

Attack collapses in Mortain Area; von Kluge warns of possible Encirclement (7 Aug)

7 Aug

216. Late on 6 Aug the German forces committed to the thrust to Avranches had captured favourable starting positions. During the night and in the morning's fog they had gained some ground. Engaged in the advance were: 116 Pz Div, 2 Pz Div, 1 SS Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Div. The mass of 9 Pz Div had been pinned down near Epron and was unavailable. By midday Le Mesnil ~~Ardelee~~, Juvigny and Mortain had been captured. But as the skies were clearing successive waves of Allied aircraft smothered the attack. German aircraft had not been able to approach the air above the field of battle. The thrust had failed. (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, Sitrep for 7 Aug)

217. At 1515 hrs 7 Aug (Schramm, op cit), Marshal Von Kluge received peremptory orders from the Fuehrer. The outcome of the undertaking would decide the battle of France; 2 SS Pz Corps and 12 SS Pz Div

or 21 Pz Div were to follow-up regardless of consequences elsewhere; after the successful breakthrough the German forces were to turn north and by envelopment bring about the collapse of the enemy in Normandy. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Appx, op cit, Appx 275, A Gp B, Ops No. 5498/44, quoting verbatim Hitler's order (OKW No. 77274/44, 7 Aug 44) to von Kluge.)

218. Commanding the waves to recede was Hitler at his truest. But 12 SS Pz Div and 21 Pz Div were now mere shadows of their former selves, 9 SS Pz Div was weak, 10 SS Pz Div had a total of five tanks fit for action at noon 7 Aug, and was hoping against hope to have twelve by the next day. (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, 7 Aug). There was no hope for success and no substance for reinforcing failure, if reinforced it must be.

219. In addition to all this, ominous signs were now appearing in the sector between Caen and Falaise. A minor assault on the lines of 86 Corps was beaten off, but at Grimbois the Fusilier Battalion of 271 Inf Div had been unable to repulse an enemy penetration, a subsequent counter-attack by 12 SS Pz Div's Battle Group Wunsche and 101 Hy SS Tk Bn had failed to eliminate the new bridgehead and the German lines had to be taken further back. In the area of 74 Corps, 276 Inf Div had been driven from Hill 365, a counter-attack with Tigers, Panthers and Assault guns had been of no avail, it became necessary to fall back on the new line: Bois du Roi - Le Plessis - Bisson - Le Quesnel (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Appx, op cit, Appx for 7 Aug 44)

220. Despite all Eberbach's pleadings to the contrary (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, 7 Aug), in the evening 10 SS Pz Div was given orders to move to the Tinchebray - St Clement area, whence it would follow 1 SS Pz Div. And 12 SS Pz Div was ordered to assemble its forces north of Condé, but heavy artillery fire falling on the German positions south of Caen was an indication of imminent developments and the formation did not leave the sector. 85 Inf Div was warned to hasten its journey to the Panzer Army, 331 Inf Div was still occupied with its Seine crossings, 344 Inf Div was rushing west by railroad, motor transport and some lesser elements on foot (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 7 Aug). At noon A Gp D had reported the estimate that British Second Army would soon be embarking on a thrust to Falaise and the Americans advancing from Le Mans in an attempt to encircle the two German Armies. In a long telephone conversation shortly before midnight Blumentritt told Jodl of all the difficulties in Normandy and said O.B. West believed "a new decision" would have to be made in the event of the armoured attack failing to reach Avranches by the evening of 8 Aug (W.D. A Gp D, 7 Aug)

8 Aug

221. During the night 7/8 Aug the expected Allied push astride the Caen-Falaise road got under way. In the Daily Sitreps of Army Group B this development was reflected in the following entries:

Fifth Panzer Army

After several hours of increasing artillery fire and area bombing, in the first hours of the morning the enemy launched the expected major attack east of the Orne between La Hogue and the Orne, with the centre of gravity astride the Caen-Falaise road.

With the commitment of 600 tanks and of fighter bomber formations he succeeded in piercing the front. By evening he had taken Cintheaux and Hautmesnil. 12 SS Pz Div, which had been making preparations for moving to the west wing of Seventh Army, had to be committed to deal with the threatening breakthrough.

Fighting is continuing, the enemy is moving up strong reserves. Heaviest fighter-bomber attacks are continuing. An attempt is being made to create a new front in the line St. Sylvain - Cauvicourt - south of Hautmesnil - Bretteville [sur Laize], and to destroy the enemy elements which have broken through to the area further south. Due to the heavy losses, the Panther Battalion of 9 Pz Div had to be moved to Fifth Panzer Army in order to deal with the situation ...

1 SS Pz Corps

In the evening enemy armour advancing further south from Cintheaux, reached Langannerie with his armoured spearheads (40 - 50 tanks). The situation in the penetration area is at the moment not known, no reports have been received from 12 SS Pz Div and 89 Inf Div. A [German] Flak combat troop is just north of Grainville. Two battalions and one light artillery battalion of 85 Inf Div - at the moment 10 km north of Trun - are being rushed to the penetration area. The Panther Battalion of 9 SS Pz Div is also being moved to the penetration point ...

Due to extremely heavy artillery fire and fighter bomber activity our attack in Grimbosq came to a halt and was broken off ...

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, Sitrep for 8 Aug)

Canadian Breakthrough to Falaise barely staved off (8 Aug)

222. In Fifth Panzer Army's War Diary the day's events were recorded in considerable detail:

- 0030 hrs Ops applies to Army Gp B on the basis of situation as assessed by C. of S.
1 SS Pz Corps for the return to command of
12 SS Pz Div and return to their former area.
- 0045 hrs Lt-Col von Kluge* advises Army Gp had decided 12 SS Pz Div would stand at the disposal of Pz Army as heretofore. Nevertheless, all measures were to be taken for a speedy transfer to the zone of Seventh Army.
- 0545 hrs C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reports that the enemy started to attack at 0435 hrs along the whole front of 89 Inf Div after severe drum fire and was able to achieve a break-in between Tilly and Verrières. Single tanks pushed forward as far as St. Aignan. Situation around Rocquancourt is still unclarified. An armoured battle group is engaged in a counter-attack against Pyramide. The enemy succeeded during the morning in occupying Rocquancourt. Elements of 89 Inf Div are holding out at this time in the secondary line near St. Aignan.
La Hogue and Hill 75 are likewise still in our hands. The opponent attacked during the night against 74 Corps, following intense arty preparation and laying down of smoke screen, in the Le Plessis area. This place was lost. We were able to seal off the penetration.
- 1325 hrs A Gp B orders all preparations to be made for releasing two projector brigades for despatch to Seventh Army. Army decides on 8 and 9 Proj Bdes.
- 1355 hrs Ops 1, 1 SS Pz Corps reports: Most intense bombing by more than one thousand 4 motored bombers, particularly on the right wing of 1 SS Pz Corps.
- 1405 hrs Ops 1, 86 Army Corps reports:
200 tanks in area Bellengreville -
Le Bas de Bellengreville - Frénouville.
- 1410 hrs C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reports:
100 tanks are advancing from Frénouville in southerly direction.

*Lt Col von Kluge, C. of S. Pz Gp Eberbach, son of Field Marshal von Kluge.

1420 hrs C. of S. reports the situation of 1 SS Pz Corps and 86 Corps to C. of S. A Gp B. He urgently requests Luftwaffe support against tank concentrations near Rocquancourt and Frénouville. General Speidel will try everything to obtain this support, but with little promise of success, as all flying formations are committed in support of the attack on Avranches.

A Gp orders: immediate despatch of two projector brigades to Seventh Army.

General Gause promises to get 8 Proj Bde on the march immediately. At this moment it is impossible to get the Projector Brigade of 86 Corps on the march, as the brigade is engaged in heavy fighting at Frénouville. Departure presumably only by tonight.

1425 hrs Army orders 2 SS Pz Corps to despatch 8 Proj Bde at once, Cmd ahead to Seventh Army.

1600 hrs In view of the critical situation of 1 SS Pz Corps and 86 Corps (600 enemy tanks), O.B. instructs General Gause to ask A Gp B for the return of 1 SS Pz Div to the Panzer Army. As the attack at Grimbosq has also petered out, O.B. is considering moving back the main line of resistance during the coming night to the line Grimbosq - les Moutiers - Cintheux - St. Sylvain - Moul, probably even throwing straight into battle the newly arriving elements of 85 Inf Div.

1610 hrs C. of S. applies to Army Group B for return of 1 SS Pz Div and bringing it under command again of Pz Army. Army Group declines this with the justification that the remaining elements of 1 SS Pz Div had already been committed by Seventh Army.

C. of S. then describes the situation of 1 SS Pz Corps and 86 Corps. He draws attention to the gravity of the situation.

1645 hrs C. of S. instructs SS-Col Piepkorn to reckon with the detachment of battle group Oelboetter and 600 Engr Bn from the Corps.

1700 hrs Pz Army orders 86 Corps to get 9 Proj Bde on the march to Seventh Army, this very night.

1730 hrs C. of S. describes the situation of the Panzer Army to General Speidel and prepares him for the fact that the main line of resistance will have to be withdrawn during the coming night, as it could no longer be held against the severe enemy pressure.

Even a stand in this new line would be uncertain. Army intends to commit elements of the newly arriving 85th Infantry Division between 1 SS Pz Corps and 86 Corps, as no reserves were at the disposal of either Corps for the sealing of the gap.

1750 hrs O.B. briefs Lt-Col von Kluge on the situation. The morale of the infantry has fallen appreciably despite energetic intervention of the division commanders. O.B. proposes that the order to hand over a second projector brigade be annulled. The return of 1 SS Pz Div is once more declined by the Army Group. In fact, it is being considered that 9 SS Pz Div be thrown into the Seventh Army's attack.

As there can no longer be any thought of halting on the main line of resistance, which has been pierced in many places, O.B. applies for withdrawal of the main line of resistance to:
Troarn - St. Pierre - Moulton -
Billy - St. Sylvain - Cauvicourt
- Bretteville - Les Moutiers - Le
Bas. O.B. requests a decision most urgently.

1910 hrs C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reports that the occupation of the line St. Aignan - Conteville will not be possible now, as only small groups are now fighting in this area and the enemy has already pushed through with tanks as far as Hautmesnil. Hence he proposes the line suggested by O.B. to O.B. West, that is, 12 SS Pz Div would move into the line St. Sylvain inclusive - Cauvicourt exclusive, 85 Inf Div: Cauvicourt inclusive - Bretteville exclusive. Thence 271 Inf Div. The "Second Position" at about Grainville - Conde' will be occupied by the newly attached 85 Inf Div.

2000 hrs Army Group B orders immediate transfer of one Arty Bn of 74 Corps and Proj Bde 9 to Seventh Army. After an exhaustive description by General Eberbach of the Panzer Army's difficult position, this order is changed to the effect that [only] one regiment of the Projector Brigade is to move off.

2100 hrs Telephone conversation between Field Marshal von Kluge and General Eberbach:

May I orient the Field Marshal on the situation? At the front of 86 Corps the enemy has attacked between Chicheboville - St. Aignan and has pushed forward into the area Conteville. Poussy and Conteville still in our hands. A number of enemy tanks knocked out.

With 1 SS Pz Corps: There the enemy has forced his way into the main line of resistance after aerial preparation more intense than on 18 Jul. Starting last evening at 1000 hrs and lasting throughout the whole night. With a very large number of tanks, about 500.

What, 500?

Yes, at Chicheboville alone there were 200 continuously throughout the whole day. The enemy has penetrated the main line of resistance there and pushed forward as far as St. Aignan, retaken in counter-attack. Then renewed area bombings, which crushed 12 SS Pz Div so that only individual tanks came back. The enemy pressed forward further south as far as Gaumesnil and is continuing his advance. 1 SS Pz Corps has built up a battle line with anti-tank and flak guns, which has held so far. Whether this line will hold out until tomorrow if the enemy attacks more energetically is questionable. Actually, the new Infantry Division as well as the Hitler Youth Division are 50% knocked out. I shall be lucky if by tonight I am able to round up 20 tanks, including Tigers.

The onslaught continued throughout the whole day against 271 Inf Div.

Detachments of Hitler Youth Division were thrown in there. They had considerable casualties from enemy drum fire. 271 Inf Div: 2000 casualties, infantry very weak. No success in ejecting the enemy from Grimbois. On the contrary, with new tanks which he is continuously bringing across the river, he has taken Brieux. On 74 Corps' front the enemy has attacked energetically and so far, broken through the main line of resistance with 40 tanks in the direction of Cauville. Le Plessis was captured by him, but since noon it is back again in our hands.

Located opposite 74 Corps: 7 Brit Armd Div, 8 Brit Armd Bde, 27 Brit Armd Bde, 50 and 53 Brit Inf Divs. The opponent will, with good weather, again continue his attacks tomorrow and endeavour to

push through in the direction of Falaise. I will commit, as second line, two Gren Bns, one Arty Bn and one 8.8cm Anti Tk Coy. I must confess quite frankly that I am looking forward to tomorrow with anxiety.

2100 hrs I can understand that.

I cannot take out the two mortar brigades before nightfall.

You are not giving up a whole brigade but only a regiment; arrange this with Seventh Army yourself. Likewise the Russian Arty Bn 15.5 cm remains with you. We must both be clear thereon, tomorrow or the day after, there will be a decision here. I am unfortunately not in a position to send you anything. Whatever can still be brought across the Seine will be sent to you under all circumstances.

That this would all go so quickly, we too did not expect. But I can imagine that it did not happen quite so unexpectedly.

I have always anticipated this and have always looked forward to the coming day with a very heavy heart.

2115 hrs SS-Col Kraemer reports, that according to a message from 89 Inf Div an enemy armoured spearhead of 40 to 50 tanks has broken through at Hautmesnil and is said to be near Langannerie (NW of Grainville) at the moment.

No further forces of 12 SS Pz Div are available to fight against this opponent as the battle group Oelboetter is also still far off.

And the leading elements of the new infantry division too will not be arriving before tomorrow morning.

2125 hrs General Gause enquires of Cmdr 3 Flak Corps, what forces are still located around Langannerie and available for intercepting the tank thrust just reported. General Pickert states that, south of Langannerie an 8.8 cm tank trap has been constructed. In addition he has also ordered forward a Flak battle group from the Orne, but it would not be able to arrive there before tomorrow morning.

2135 hrs 2 SS Pz Corps receives orders from Army to get under way immediately to 1 SS Pz Corps any Pz IV and V still remaining with 9 SS Pz Div. Likewise, the Flak Bn of 85 Inf Div which is there at present.

2135 hrs Continuation of tel con between
Field Marshal von Kluge and General
Eberbach:

Reporting that the enemy has pushed through with 40 tanks to the South and has attained Langannerie north of Grainville. I have nothing left, as 85 Inf Div only arrives tomorrow morning. I have spoken to the Flak to the effect that they take the 8.8 cm up front and that they be committed south of Grainville in order to intercept this tank thrust, for I have trepidations that the enemy will push further to the South as there is moonlight. The situation is, that the Hitler Youth Division has been exhausted so much by area bombings that 1 SS Pz Corps was not able even by means of roving staff officers to get together a combat team again. Telecoms, wireless included, are knocked out.

2½ Bns of 89 Inf Div are between Hautmesnil and Bretteville.

How about the Arty?

89 Inf Div and 12 SS Pz Div: 50% casualties.

As a last measure, I have set into march this night 20 tanks of 9 SS Pz Div, but I fear that, with the long approach march, only half of them will arrive tomorrow morning.

2150 hrs C. of S. informs SS-Col Kraemer that he is despatching at once to 1 SS Pz Corps from 2 SS Pz Corps: 9 Mk IV and 7 Mk V tanks and, in addition, the Flak Battalion and the Anti-Tank Battalion of 85 Inf Div.

C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reports that the Corps would move Cnd Post to Morteaux-Couliboef during the night.

2220 hrs Continuation of tel con between
Field Marshal von Kluge and
General Eberbach: If you get back one Panzer Division which I had taken away from you, what will you then be short of most?

Most of all, tanks are lacking.

Have you a Commander who understands how to handle tanks? Where is the Commander of the Hitler Youth?

The Hitler Youth Commander telephoned me this afternoon from St. Aignan; he was there to organize the resistance.

That is "Rapid Meyer" (der schnelle Meyer). Have you had news from him since then?

No news. That was before the area bombing.

Early, or during the night?

I mean the bomb carpet which was laid down anew towards noonday. Since then, I have no further news from him.

If I send you a tank formation, would that help you?

Yes.

Have you then a man who could lead them?

Yes, that man Wunsche.

He is still there? Aha! I am considering whether I should still send you a Panzer Battalion.

If it were possible.

Perhaps also another one from Alençon. During the night, naturally.

If we are lucky with the fog. If they could come to Falaise? I would spot fuel there.

Yes, I will call you up shortly.

2330 hrs Continuation of telephone conversation
between Field Marshal von Kluge
and General Eberbach:

Has the situation deteriorated or improved?

One cannot say improved, the opponent appears to arrange his formations afresh. All his attacks have been conducted with tanks without infantry. Since the Evening Report, I have the impression that everywhere, including 74 Corps, he is withdrawing tank forces to engage them too in the main area of penetration on the Caen road in the direction of Falaise. I believe that tomorrow he will attack perhaps even stronger still and on a wider front; from left flank 1 SS Pz Corps up to 86 Corps. Enemy has pressed forward from Hautmesnil with very strong elements through to Langannerie. I hope that we succeed in destroying the enemy during this night in Langannerie where he is not supposed to be so strong (12 tanks), and hold the line St. Sylvain - Bretteville.

With what forces will you do that?

With elements of 86 Corps (battle groups), and elements of Hitler Youth Division.

No contact with Meyer so far, only Wunsche is here.

The tanks of 9 Pz Div will be sent off on the march from Argentan to Falaise, so that early tomorrow they will be half way on. That is a very weighty decision for me, a major abandonment of an order that has been given to me. I know of no other solution - have no further forces. If it goes on like this tomorrow, there will be no more stopping at all.

At 0500 hrs, a capable senior officer of Fifth Panzer Army or 1 SS Pz Corps is to stand at the railway crossing 800 m south of Falaise on the road leading from Argentan to Falaise, forked roads south of the railway. I know that, in the long run, the forces will be inadequate.

2350 hrs C. of S. 2 SS Pz Corps reports that the tanks which were earmarked for handing over, are built into the main line of resistance, hence he would immediately send the Tiger Battalion with 13 tanks at the moment ready for action.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 8 Aug).

223. The German armour in the Mortain area was able to make some headway in the morning, but was forced back again later in the day. A Gp B intended strengthening the forces by moving in 10 SS Pz Div, parts of 9 Pz Div, two projector brigades and one G.H.Q. heavy artillery battalion. Whether these measures, in combination with a careful planning of the attack would lead to a successful resumption of the undertaking "depended on developments in the meantime". (A Gp B, Sitrep for 8 Aug)

224. O.B. West believed the attempted encirclement of Fifth and Seventh Armies would be followed by a thrust towards Paris. He gave orders, therefore, to transfer 6 Para Div and 48 Inf Div from Fifteenth Army to the area west and northwest of Paris. In addition he asked OKW for permission to despatch the following forces to the "still empty" spaces of Paris:

from First Army: Army Headquarters and the Army Troops

from Nineteenth Army: one corps headquarters;
.11 Pz Div, 242 Inf Div
and 64 Inf Div

(W.D. A Gp D, 8 Aug)

Panzer Group West re-named Fifth Panzer Army (8 Aug)

225. On 27 Jul Panzer Group West had been told it was being given Army status (para 189 above). Since then most of the Panzer Group documents had been signed "Panzer Army West". On 8 Aug Panzer Army West informed all concerned of its new and now official designation: "Fifth Panzer Army".

(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Appxs,
op cit, Appx 267, Pz AOK-5, Ops No.
815/44, 8 Aug 44)

9 Aug

226. In the Daily Report of A Gp B for 9 Aug the developments in the area of 1 SS Pz Corps were described as follows:

The bitter fighting in the penetration area south of Cintheaux continued all day. The severity of the battles and the excellent efforts of our own troops were demonstrated by the disabling of 90 enemy tanks today.

After repelling several enemy attacks St. Sylvain was lost in the evening. Soignolles, Estrées, Bretteville le Rabet, Urville, Couvix as well as Bretteville sur laize were lost after hard fighting. Along the Caen - Falaise road the enemy advanced in the evening to Chateau le Quesnay (south of Grainville). A counterattack with Tigers is under way. The enemy, who has advanced via Bretteville in the direction of Barbery, has occupied the wooded area southwest of Couvix. An attack from Le Bas towards the South was repulsed.

(A Gp B, Sitrep. for 9 Aug)

227. Some additional information taken from the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army, appears below in the form of paraphrased excerpts:

The Panther Battalion of 9 Pz Div, which was supposed to become available to 1 SS Pz Corps today to prevent a breakthrough along the Caen - Falaise road, could not be committed. O.B. West ordered the unit to Seventh Army.

The armour of 12 SS Pz Div - of negligible strength by now - was strengthened by the arrival of 2 SS Pz Div's Tiger Battalion.

In view of the situation, however, General Eberbach in the afternoon authorized a withdrawal during the night 9/10 Aug to the line: west fringe Moulton - west fringe Airan - west fringe Bray-la-Campagne - western outskirts of Fierville-la-Campagne, - western extremity of woods SE St. Sylvain - Estrées-la-Campagne - southern outskirts Grainville - north fringe Bois de St. Germain - Cingal - Thury-Harcourt - southern limits of St. Pierre - Lassy.

At 2120 hrs Panzer Army told A Gp B 1 SS Pz Corps had only 15 tanks IV, 5 panthers and 15 tigers. By tomorrow it would be impossible to prevent a breakthrough to Falaise.

At 2200 hrs Army Group B gave orders for the immediate transfer to Seventh Army of one projector regiment from 9 Proj Bde (then with 86 Corps).

(G.M.D.S.-63181/2; W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Part II, 9 Aug-9 Sep 44, 9 Aug, (Photostat 981PA5(D2))

228. H.Q. 89 Inf Div were 500 m SE Glatigny (5 km NNW Falaise). One grenadier regiment, one artillery battalion and a company of Engineers from 85 Inf Div had been committed, the mass of the formation would reach the area St. Pierre-sur-Dives (20 km NE Falaise) - St. Marguerite (5 kms W Livarot) in the early morning hours of 10 Aug. H.Q. 85 Inf Div was at Ammeville (10 km N Trun). The Division was placed under 1 SS Pz Corps (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps, Sitrep 9 Aug 44) The mass of 331 Inf Div had crossed the Seine and was moving towards the line: Gace - Echauffene - Aube-sur-Risle (A Gp B, Sitrep for 9 Aug). A reproduction of the German High Command Situation Map "France" with the German dispositions in Normandy on 9 Aug 44, is being permanently retained by Historical Section (G.S.)(OKW Sit Map "France", 9 Aug 44)(Photostat 981HC(D26)).

Von Kluge writes off Avranches Attack. Hitler orders its renewal from Domfront Area (9 Aug)

229. In the Mortain area enemy pressure forced 47 Pz Corps to yield some ground. In the war diary of A Gp D the Avranches attack was written off at 1035 hrs 9 Aug:

Due to the considerable increase in enemy pressure on the ground, and the continuing complete enemy superiority in the air, further successes are no longer to be expected from this attack group.

(W.D. A Gp D, 9 Aug)

But Hitler saw the situation in a different light. At 1745 hrs General Jodl telephoned von Kluge. A new directive would reach O.B. West in the evening; the thrust to Avranches was to be repeated. The directive was received at 2300 hrs 9 Aug. It began:

47 Pz Corps' attack, launched prematurely and therefore without sufficient strength and in weather favouring the enemy airforce has had no success. It is to be resumed with strong forces at another point. To this end I recommend

(A Gp B, Misc Fuehrer Orders, op cit, A Gp B, Ops No. 5833/44, 10 Aug 44, quoting in full Fuehrer Order: Wfst Ops No 772801/44, 9 Aug) (Photostat and Translation 981 A Gp B (D2))

O.B. West was directed to launch the new attack from Domfront and the area northwest of it. The group was to move first towards the Southwest, later wheeling to the Northwest. To release needed forces Seventh Army might be taken back. South of Domfront the units already in the area, and the divisions approaching from Fifteenth Army, were to form a further attack-group and to follow the advancing armour on the left, covering its deep flank and, in case of need, thrusting also southwards into the northern flank of the American forces. Regarding the date of the attack the Fuehrer reserved the decision to himself. Imperative was the prevention at all cost of an enemy breakthrough at the northern front, in particular at Falaise, the point of greatest danger. 1 SS Pz Corps in consequence would have to be strengthened ... (Ibid)

230. With O.B. West's request for transfer of formations (para 224 above) Hitler agreed on the whole: First Army Headquarters with all Army troops, Headquarters 81 Corps, 48 Inf Div and 6 Para Div from Fifteenth Army, and 338 Inf Div from Nineteenth Army might be employed. An additional division might be brought in from Fifteenth Army as soon as 226, 64 and 59 Inf Divs of Nineteenth Army reached the area of Fifteenth Army. 11 Pz Div, however, was not released for transfer. (Ibid)

Eberbach to conduct Attack; Objections disregarded. Dietrich to command Fifth Panzer Army (9 Aug)

231. The attack from Domfront was to be conducted by General Eberbach; during his absence Sepp Dietrich was to command Fifth Panzer Army (Ibid). Eberbach was fully aware of the catastrophic consequences of the proposed attack. But he had no choice but to obey or defy a direct order. From his extensive discussions of the subject in his postwar narratives the following is quoted here:

... O.B. West gave me orders by telephone to turn command of Fifth Panzer Army over to SS Gen Sepp Dietrich. The attack on Avranches is to be repeated in compliance with an order of the Fuehrer. With an emergency staff, I, subordinated to the commander of Seventh Army, SS Gen Hausser, am to assume command of the panzer divisions which have been provided for this attack. I reiterated immediately that I considered the attack as hopeless and that the assignment, therefore, would be very unpleasant to me. The orders, however, were not changed. I was to go to Seventh Army that same day.

Upon my arrival, it was obvious that Seventh Army was not pleased with my being assigned there. The insertion of my staff between the Army Staff and corps staffs was unnecessary, and, in the prevailing situation, meant a very unpleasant lengthening of the command channel. So far as my dismissal as commander of Fifth Panzer Army is concerned, I think that the distrust against army generals after the 20 Jul 44 incident was the decisive factor. It would have been unaccountable, otherwise, to take me away from Fifth Panzer

Army after seven weeks of faultless command and to give it to SS Gen Dietrich who was unable to fulfil the task. It also would have been unaccountable to subordinate me to the C-in-C. of the neighbouring Army for the purpose of carrying out an attack I had repeatedly declared as hopeless and for which, moreover, I was unnecessary.

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B. MS A-922,
Panzer Group Eberbach and the
Falaise Encirclement, Transl.
p. 11 (981SOM(D124))

Fifth Panzer Army: Corps Boundaries (10 Aug)

10 Aug

232. In the area of Fifth Panzer Army the day was relatively quiet. South of Grainville the Germans lost and recaptured Hill 195. Harassing fire was laid on heavy Allied armour and infantry concentrations in a great number of localities north of 1 SS Pz Corps front. A major attack on 11 Aug or soon thereafter was clearly to be expected (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Part II, op cit, 10 Aug) 1 SS Pz Corps was forming a Corps reserve composed of the Battle Group of 12 SS Pz Div, 101 Hy SS Tk Bn, 102 Hy SS Tk Bn (less one coy), two projector batteries (S.P.) and one assault gun company (G.M.D.S.-63181/4, W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps 9 Aug-9 Sep 44, Sitrep 10 Aug)(981PA5(D5)). Amongst the new boundary lines reported were the following:

86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps

St. Sylvain (1 SS) - Le Bu (86)
Maizieres (1 SS) - Vendeuvre (1 SS).

12 SS Pz Div and 271 Inf Div

Tournebu (271) - Moulines (271) -
Point 122 (north of Barberry)(271)

1 SS Pz Corps and 74 Corps

Esson (1 SS) - Thury-Harcourt (74)
- la Metairie (74).

74 Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps

La Varende (74) - St. Jean de Blanc (74)
Danvou (74)

(A Gp B, Sitrep for 10 Aug)

233. O.B. West announced the tentative composition of the forces slated for the Domfront attack:

Headquarters 47 Pz Corps
Headquarters 58 Pz Corps

2, 9, 116 Pz Divs,
2 and 10 SS Pz Divs
8 and 9 Proj Bdes
992 Hy Arty Bn

On the subject of the projected attack Hausser and Eberbach had evidently been unable to see eye to eye:

The combat value of our own forces is the criterion for the feasibility of the attack. As the views of Generals Hausser and Eberbach do not agree, O.B. West will bring about a clarification of the matter in a personal discussion with both generals in the morning of 11 Aug.

(W.D. A Gp D, 10 Aug)

To protect the open left flank of Seventh Army, 17 and 18 G.A.F. Field Divisions were ordered to the battle area; 344 Inf Div, already en route, was directed to the same area. (Ibid). American forces were surging northwards from Le Mans; apparently the Allies intended to carry out the encirclement of Fifth and Seventh Armies before marching on to Paris. (Ibid)

234. At 2115 hrs OKW was informed by O.B. West that the enemy, after an initial thrust in easterly direction, had now wheeled to the North by way of Mayenne - Beaumont - Bonnetable - La Ferte-Bernard, and in combination with the drive on Falaise was clearly striving to encircle Fifth and Seventh Armies. 81 Corps was unable to protect the southern flank and the indispensable supply road Alençon-Flers as well. To protect the staging area for the projected attack O.B. West requested authority to conduct a swift and sharp panzer thrust against the enemy spearheads pushing towards the North. (Schramm, p. 87; W.D. A Gp D, 10 Aug)

11 Aug

235. In the area of Fifth Panzer Army the day brought no major developments. Early in the morning the opponent again broke into the main line of resistance at St. Sylvain and penetrated the forest of Chateau Quesnay. 12 SS Pz Div was unable to restore the situation. An armoured foray from Grainville in southwesterly direction was ultimately stopped. Minor attacks occurred also in the sector of 86 Corps. Shortly before noon Eberbach told Gause he had suggested taking the front to the rear of the Dives sector. Lt Col von Kluge told Gause that Eberbach had reached the conclusion the Avranches attack was impossible, had reported to higher authority in that sense and proposed an attack designed to protect the [endangered] flank [of Seventh Army]. 86 Corps reported that the enemy in the woods southeast of St. Sylvain was very strong; a counterattack without assistance from 1 SS Pz Corps would be hopeless. Towards evening strong British forces broke into the lines of 2 SS Pz Corps at Chenedolle. Corps reported the front would be untenable unless 86 Corps and the left wing of 1 SS Pz Corps withdrew to the 'Third Line'. The Army Commander (Dietrich) told Gause the present positions of 2 SS Pz Corps were to be held at all cost. 2 SS Pz Corps thereupon employed its last reserves to establish a blocking line le Coqs - Hill 235 - Campinots - L'Aunay. Recognized armour and infantry preparations seemed to foreshadow attacks on 12 Aug on both sides of the Caen - Falaise road and west of the Orne as well. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Part II, op cit, 11 Aug)

236. At 0200 hrs 11 Aug General Jodl asked O.B. West on the telephone for additional information regarding the proposed thrust against XV American Corps. The Marshal said 363 Inf Div had been almost wiped out at the northern front and had to be replaced by 331 Inf Div, which, therefore, would not be available for other employment. Moreover, 12 SS Pz Div had suffered greatly in the last big attack, and 89 Inf Div had almost been knocked out, so that 85 Inf Div could not be diverted from the area north of Falaise. The Divisions required for the Domfront attack could not be ready before 20 Aug; the enemy was getting stronger; Eberbach had made an unfavourable prognosis; Hausser was overestimating the fighting value of the available forces; a clarification of this all important aspect would be sought during the day in personal talks with the two commanders..

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit,
A G B, Ops No. 5835/44, 0445 hrs
11 Aug) (Photostats 981AGpB(D3))

German Field Commanders report Domfront Attack impossible.
Hitler demands Destruction of American Forces in Area
Le Mans - Mamers-Alençon (11 Aug)

237. Reporting on his conversations with the Army commanders von Kluge said at 1215 hrs Hausser and Eberbach were now in agreement and he shared their view that the Domfront attack was no longer possible. Moreover, the situation was deteriorating from hour to hour; it was necessary to reach a decision; this decision could only be to attack and beat the enemy at Alençon; he desired an immediate decision (Ibid, A Gp B, Ops No. 5833/44 [sic], 1215 hrs 11 Aug). Meekly agreeing with Hausser rather than boldly setting forth his own views was somewhat unheroic of von Kluge, but it was clever and effective. For Hausser was not merely a capable officer, but also a faithful Nazi, and Hitler agreed quickly. After some hasty and desultory intermediate decisions Hitler issued an order directing in the main:

XV American Corps in the area Le Mans - Mamers - Alençon to be destroyed by concentric attack. A strong armoured force under General Eberbach to drive from the Lille - Guillaume - Beaumont line into the deep flank of the Americans advancing in the Alençon - Mamers area. In the meantime strongest resistance at Falaise and Mortain; the intention of carrying out attack towards the West to be maintained. 11 Pz Div to remain with Nineteenth Army. To protect Paris and the rear of A Gp B, First Army to place a group of divisions in the Chartres area (338 Inf Div, 48 Inf Div, later also 18 GAF Fd Div).

For full text of this order see:
(Ibid, A Gp B, Ops No. 5951/44
0030 hrs 12 Aug, quoting WFSt/Ops
No. 772830/44, 11 Aug 44, signed
Adolf Hitler).

Signs of a new Drive for Falaise (12 Aug)

12 Aug

238. Fifth Panzer Army recorded the day's events in the following entry:

The enemy continues his attack upon the whole front of the Army. Fighting was particularly violent in the sector of 1 SS Pz Corps, where ~~the~~ enemy reached le Bu [La Bu-sur Rouvres]. After heavy artillery preparation he also succeeded in forming an entry into Thury-Harcourt. In the area of 74 Corps the opponent was able to extend his penetration near St. Pierre towards the East. Sealing off the gap did not succeed. Hence the Army commander applied during the afternoon to A Gp B for a withdrawal of the front to the third line.

Towards evening C. of S. orients Marshal von Kluge on the situation: On the whole the enemy confined himself during the day to local attack, the exception being a somewhat stronger attack against the centre of 74 Corps, which led to the breakthrough mentioned above. According to intelligence reports, however, the big attack south of Caen must be expected any day. In this area the enemy has completed the insertion of 4 - 5 large armoured formations and has moved the assembly areas close to the foremost front lines.

The Field Marshal too [like Dietrich] holds a withdrawal of the whole front to the third line to be premature and proposes the line: 1 km north of Esson - le Vey - Canteloup - la Chapelle - la Rocque.

In the evening General Gause transmits the Field Marshal's order for withdrawal to 1 SS Pz Corps and 74 Corps

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Part II
op cit, 12 Aug).

239. In the intermediate situation reports of the Panzer Army mention was also made of an enemy advance from Barbery to Moulines, followed by hard fighting in the Moulines - Bois Halbout area. During the night 12/13 Aug, from the centre of 1 SS Pz Corps to the left Army boundary, the main line of resistance would be taken back to: Moulines - Cesny - Bois Halbout - Esson - Orne from Caumont to Clécy - Proussy - La Chapelle - La Roque - la Vautrie [1.5 km E Chenedolle]. The attacks on the front of 86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps were to be assessed as reconnaissances for forthcoming operations.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps,
Sitreps 12 Aug)

240. The serious crisis north of Falaise on 8 Aug had revealed the firm Allied intention of driving to and probably past Falaise. With the Allied southern flank being screened off in an obviously perfunctory manner, and American spearheads at the southern flank of Seventh Army veering to the North, incipient encirclement was clearly discernible. Inside of the newly formed front-arc Eberbach's forces were being

assembled for the thrust against XV U.S. Corps (Schramm, pp. 89-90). In the afternoon OKW informed O.B. West of the Fuehrer's emphatic insistence on the execution of this attack. (W.D. A Gp D, 12 Aug)

241. Added harassment seemed to be in the making. Army Group G had reported 15 Aug being mentioned freely as the day of the forthcoming Allied assault on Southern France. Nineteenth Army ordered the highest degree of alert, it wanted 338 Inf Div to remain with the Army, and 11 Pz Div deployed astride the Rhone. (Ibid)

13 Aug

242. Communications were disturbed almost everywhere during this day, and higher headquarters received little information on developments in the area of Fifth Panzer Army. In the Army's War Diary the following was entered:

The withdrawal ordered on 12 Aug was carried out everywhere according to plan. In view of the situation the command post of Fifth Panzer Army is being moved to Fontaine l'Abbe (8 km west of Bernay).

In a telephone conversation the Army commander told Army Group B's Chief of Staff that Eberbach's attack tomorrow towards the South would come too late. He insisted the Highest Command ought to decide at last to remove the forces west of the Orne from the threat of encirclement.

During the day enemy infantry and tanks attacked from Tournebu and succeeded in reaching the wooded area further south; the enemy also advanced into the woods south of Acqueville. At Clair Tizon the enemy infiltrated through the defence. During the night 13/14 Aug 1 SS Pz Corps will take up the following line: Chateau Quesnay - Hill 195 - Cinglais - la Commanderie - Clair Tizon - Mortainville - Chateau Meslay - Donnay - Combray.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 13 Aug).

Von Kluge wants to shorten distended Front. Requests new Directive (13 Aug)

243. Early on 13 Aug A Gp B received a signal from the commander of Seventh Army. He urged a north - south front through Falaise; "leaving the troops continuously exposed to the danger of a breakthrough could be of no avail" (A Gp B, Weekly Sitreps and Estimates, op cit, Tac HQ Seventh Army, Ops No 731 (Radiogram No. 299), 2230 hrs 12 Aug, received 0428 hrs 13 Aug). (Photostat 981AGpB(D3)). In the evening O.B. West informed OKW of his desire to withdraw from the Flers salient (Ibid, A Gp B, Ops No. 6044/44, 1800 hrs 13 Aug, typed signature von Kluge, hand-signed Speidel) (Photostat 981AGpB(D3)). The contents

of this document were summarized by Schramm:

At 1800 hrs 13 Aug O.B. West reported the British forces (seven inf divs, two armd divs and three armd bdes) were assembled east of the Orne, pointing towards Falaise and northeast thereof. Anglo-American forces (fifteen inf divs, four armd divs and three armd bdes) were tying down the northern and western front, and three mech divs and eight armd divs were presumably at the southern front.* On 12 Aug, covering themselves off towards the North an American force of two infantry and two armoured divisions had wheeled sharply to the West for a thrust into the rear of Seventh Army and to forestall the presumably recognized [projected] push of our own forces. Thus the enemy is attempting to achieve an encirclement by all means. 116 Pz Div had slowed down the enemy but had been unable to prevent his pivoting, had been driven northwards and was now blocking the enemy at Argentan.

1 SS Pz Div and 2 Pz Div were making only slow progress and would probably have to begin fighting during their West-East movement, in order to shake off the enemy in the rear. Moving up further panzer divisions (9 and 10 SS Pz Divs) would be essential, as the strength of the formations had declined and room for deployment was getting ever more limited. Particularly in regard to supply, the situation was making it necessary to disengage the rear.

To gain Panzer forces, O.B. West therefore proposed to withdraw during the night 14/15 Aug to a tendon line astride Flers and to despatch all panzer forces to the Eberbach Group (except 2 SS Pz Div destined for the protection of the southern flank). If the present distended front were maintained it would be penetrated and enveloped, and there were no forces available for a relief operation. Hence O.B. West's request for a new directive.

(Schramm, pp. 90-91)

Canadian Drive on Falaise Resumed (14 Aug)

14 Aug

244. The day's main event was the launching of the new drive towards Falaise:

Towards midday the enemy commenced the anticipated large scale attack with strong infantry and armour against the entire front of 1 SS Pz Corps and the left wing of 86 Corps.

*The original text reads: "Against the loose defences of the southern front three mechanized and one armoured division can be brought into play, (Doc cit)

Supported strongly by fighter-bombers he succeeded in reaching Rouvres - Ouilly and in pushing through with 70 tanks to Condé. He was also able to reach St. Germain on the left wing of 1 SS Pz Corps.

Only by throwing in all available forces was it possible to seal off the breach there. In view of the threatening breakthrough towards Falaise C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps applies for withdrawal of the mainline of resistance to the line: Sassy - Aubigny - Noron.

Due to 1 SS Pz Corps being taken back, the left wing of 86 Corps is becoming visibly thinner and is threatening to tear open. 86 Corps, therefore, receives orders to seek out a new line in the rear of the Dives sector.

At 1530 hrs General Gause instructs General Kraemer to hold the line Ernes - Soulangy - Bonnoeil for today [at least] at all costs, as otherwise the sole large highway to the West would be severed.

Kraemer does not believe that this line can be held, as the opponent is already inside St. Germain and is attacking with very strong forces (three inf divs, one armd div and one armd bde).

During the afternoon the Army receives orders for withdrawing 74 Corps and 2 SS Pz Corps to a new line.* The purpose of this measure is to disengage 2 SS Pz Corps for transfer to Pz Gp Eberbach.

Following a verbal situation report by the Chief of Staff to the Army Commander, who at the moment was at the headquarters of 1 SS Pz Corps, A Gp B was requested to move 21 Pz Div behind 1 SS Pz Corps without delay, as the forces of the Corps had been depleted by the big attack in progress to the point where a breakthrough to Falaise could hardly be prevented any longer.

Towards evening General Kraemer reports the main battle line could no longer be held because it had been pierced at numerous points. The Corps will

*During night 14/15 Aug to Pontecoulant - west of St. Germain - Bislière; during night 15/16 Aug to Clécy - Condé - Montilli. The following to be disengaged and moved to Group Eberbach in the area north of Briouze:

night 14/15 Aug	9 SS Pz Div and bulk 21 Pz Div
night 15/16 Aug	balance 21 Pz Div and H.Q. 2 SS Pz Corps

(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Vol of Apps,
op cit, Apps 19, [14 Aug] Fifth
Pz Army, Ops No. 930/44)

withdraw during the night to the following line:
Southern extremity of the woods 2 km NW
Vendeuvre - (linking up there with 86 Corps)
- Hill 80 - Hill 78 - Hill 175 - Glatigny
- Leffard - Trepel - le Val la Mere (junction
there with 74 Corps). Should the panzers of 11 Pz
Div promised him for the following day not come up
the Corps will not be able to hold Falaise tomorrow
if the enemy renews the attack. Due to the day's
heavy fighting 86 Corps requests that the main line
be taken back to the line: woods NW Vendeuvre -
Magny-la-Campagne - Vieux Fumes - Airan....

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 14 Aug)

Hitler insists on Attack in Alençon - Carrouges Area (14 Aug)

245. In the meantime Marshal von Kluge's pessimistic situation report of 13 Aug (para 243 above) had brought forth a quick reaction in the form of a Fuehrer Order insisting on the execution of the attack against XV U.S. Corps. The order (WFSt Ops No. 772864/44) reached A Gp B at 0430 hrs 14 Aug (W.D. A Gp D, 14 Aug) and was relayed to A Gp B at 0445 hrs:

The situation today in the rear of the Army Group is the result of the bungled initial attack against Avranches. Due to the enemy **now having** turned sharply to the West the danger exists of Panzer Group Eberbach - which has been committed much too far to the North - becoming once again involved in a merely frontal struggle devoid of decisive effects.

Hence, once more I command:

The battle against the enemy in the Alençon - Carrouges area must lead to the destruction of a large portion of XV U.S. Corps. 9 and 10 SS Pz Divs and 21 Pz Div can and must be brought in for this purpose. However, the assault group Eberbach is now at last to be committed so far to the South that the enemy will be caught in his deep flank and be unable to launch a counter-thrust of his own against [Eberbach's] right flank.

Making 9 and 10 SS Pz Div and 21 Pz Div available will entail a shortening of the salient west of Flers.

O.B. West must, however, be quite clear on the fact that the more this front is moved towards the East, the quicker the enemy will move up ever greater forces against the southern flank between Domfront and Alençon. Withdrawal to the tendon line on both sides of Flers is therefore to be carried out only to the extent and at the speed imposed by enemy action.

By means of drastic orders the covering forces northwest of Chartres, and the formations henceforth arriving there, are to be thrown westwards toward the line Mortagne - Nogent le Rotrou, so as at least to

pin down strong enemy forces in that area.

The general directive for the coming days within the command of O.B. West is therefore:

Destruction of the enemy around Alençon.

Defence of Nineteenth Army's coast line against imminent landings.

All further directives depend on the outcome of the battle of Alençon.

signed: Adolf Hitler.

(A Gp B, Misc Fuehrer Orders, op cit,
17 Aug) (Photostat 981AGpB(D2))

246. Divisions of soldiers shown on a situation map by divisional symbols may be anything from a formidable force to a sorry lot. To Hitler a division was a division - and no quibbling-, but Eberbach saw clearly that his formations had shrunk to the point where they would either be extricated or slaughtered in vain. In his postwar narrative he writes:

Upon receipt of this message, on 14 Aug, (to carry out Alençon attack) I sent my last special missions staff officer to A Gp B with the following report: "Enemy attack with a presumable strength of two panzer divisions and one infantry division. He has surprised 2 Pz Div and 1 SS Pz Div while they were assembling in the forest north of Alençon and has thrown them back to the line La Ferté -- Carrouges - Carice River causing heavy losses. Parts of 116 Pz Div annihilated at Seés. Remnants hold against heavy enemy attacks both sides Argentan. Panzer strengths: 1 SS Pz Div: 30; 2 Pz Div: 25; 116 Pz Div: 15; 9 Pz Div still has the strength of one company. Owing to fighter bombers by day and traffic congestion by night the fuel and ammunition situation is very serious. Lack of fuel caused 1 SS Pz Div to blow up a number of tanks. Under flank protection, a quick withdrawal from encirclement of Seventh Army imperative to avoid catastrophe. Execution of High Command order can be undertaken only after bringing up 2 SS Pz Corps as well as fuel and ammunition, hence ~~not~~ possible before 16 Aug. Success improbable.

(Panzer Group Eberbach and the
Falaise Encirclement, op cit,
Transl p. 20)

Panzer Group Eberbach forced on Defensive. Von Kluge wants to withdraw from Pocket (14 Aug)

247. Shortly after midnight 14/15 Aug, when the day's events had been fully assessed, O.B. West had OKW informed of the situation: The big attack [on both sides of the Caen - Falaise road] had been launched. It had been halted for the moment but would be continued. 1 SS Pz Corps could only stand fast if additional forces were moved in.

To this end, 21 Pz Div was being disengaged from its present commitment. Due to lack of tanks, fuel and munitions, as well as on account of the situation in the air, the attack ordered by the Eberbach Group could not be carried out. Group Eberbach had gone over to the defensive. The Group seemed no longer able to stand up under the enemy's superiority in the air. On 15 Aug O.B. West would discuss the situation once more with Haüsser and Eberbach. If it was decided to desist from the attack the only remaining possibility was to break out with all forces from the pocket towards the Northeast. This decision would then have to be carried out without any delay (W.D. A Gp D, 14 Aug [0045 hrs 15 Aug]). On 1 July Rundstedt had suggested the evacuation of the Caen bridgehead, and two days later Marshal von Kluge appeared at his headquarters as his successor (paras 122 et seq above). Now von Kluge had told Hitler the Eberbach attack was impossible, and two days later Field Marshal Model would appear at his headquarters as his successor (para 260 below).

248. During the day O.B. West directed First Army to organize a blocking line Chartres - Orléans. Radar reports of large sea targets 50 km south of La Ciotat (halfway between Marseilles and Toulon) lead to Nineteenth Army being alerted for a landing attempt within the next few hours (W.D. A Gp D, 14 Aug). In the Weekly Situation Report of A Gp B Allied intentions were said to be the encirclement and destruction of Fifth and Seventh Armies. The transfer of General Eisenhower's headquarters to Normandy was taken as further proof of a 'second landing' no longer being probable. But the Airborne Army assembled in England might be employed in connection with the operation against A Gp B. Casualties from 6 Jun - 13 Aug had been:

3,630 officers (including 14 generals, 10 G.S.C. officers and 243 unit commanders)

151,487	NCOs and men
3,813	Russians
<u>158,930</u>	<u>Total</u>

Replacements received: 30,069
Replacements in transit: 9,933

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit,
14 Aug)

15 Aug

249. Imminent encirclement of the two German Armies and Group Eberbach was now obvious. There were no reserves to bolster the exhausted forces north of Falaise where the opponent seemed intent on advancing in the general direction of Trun. Southwest of Argentan the enemy was surging forward at Ecouche and had reached a point within 18 km of the pincer's northern arm (W.D. A Gp D, 15 Aug). During the early morning 74 Corps was driven from St. Denis. General Eberbach then wanted the Corps to stand fast in its present positions, but General Straube pointed to his utter lack of ammunition and said the line could not be held without ammunition. The War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army continues:

During the morning strong enemy armoured formations with substantial air support once more attacked the left wing of 86 Corps and the entire 1 SS Pz Corps area. Near Ernes he broke through towards the East with 100 tanks and subsequently swung off to the South towards Vendevre. He thrust to the East from Sassy and toward the South from Perriers. From Epaney he advanced to the crossroads north of Versainville. By means of counter-thrust we succeeded in intercepting the attack along the Caen - Falaise road near Soulangy.

At 1200 hrs C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reported 85 Inf Div had been almost wiped out and now consisted of a mere 1½ battalions and two 8.8 cm guns. 12 SS Pz Div had only 15 tanks left. The tanks of 11 Pz Div and the reinforcements in men which had been announced had not arrived so far. On the right wing the Corps was merely holding out in strongpoints. The support furnished by the Flak forces thrown in by 3 Flak Corps was very meagre because the batteries were located far in the rear, in part south of Falaise, for firing on air targets and hence could not intervene in the ground fighting at all. General Kraemer therefore proposed to organize all Flak forces in his area into Flak combat teams, bringing them up close to the main line of resistance as support for the heavily embattled infantry. The commander of 3 Flak Corps agreed to this.

According to a route map captured by 81 Corps from newly identified 7 U.S. Armd Div this Division had orders to drive northwards with two spearheads, one passing through Dreux and the other one through Pacy sur Eure....

At 1915 hrs General Gause told the Operations Officer of the Army Group the time had come for withdrawing 86 Corps behind the Dives. There remained only the question whether or not to take back the northern wing too. As Field Marshal von Kluge cannot be reached just now he would decide this question for himself after consulting the commander of 86 Corps. Shortly afterwards General Speidel announces that 344 Inf Div and 17 GAF Div will be brought under command of the Army with the mission to protect its deep eastern flank.

At 2100 hrs the Army Commander gave orders to take 86 Corps back behind the Dives on the line Houlgate - le Ham - Cléville - Mezidon. Junction with 1 SS Pz Corps on the southern outskirts of Moriers. On 16 Aug A Gp B then gave the order too for his withdrawal.

The heavy fighting around Soulangy - Perriers and at Epaney, and the complete exhaustion of the troops, who have fought without artillery and anti-tank weapons and almost without fuel and ammunition, have made the situation untenable. [At 2100 hrs], therefore, C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps applied for a further recession of the main line of resistance to the line: southern edge Moriers - Hill 73 western outskirts Courcy - western outskirts Louvagny.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 15 Aug).

Fifth Panzer Army under heavy Pressure (15 Aug)

250. Since early morning the expected Allied landing operation on the French south coast was in full swing. Army Group G and Nineteenth Army were reminded by OKW of their being held fully responsible "beyond the smallest doubt" for the defence of the coast against an enemy landing. (W.D. A Gp D, 15 Aug)

251. O.B. West's Order of Battle on 15 Aug 44 appears in Appendix "K" to the present report. (See para 155 above).

At Height of Crisis von Kluge cannot be found. Army Commanders anxious to get Forces out of Pocket. Hitler Order for Conduct of Operations; Hausser temporarily in Command of both Armies (15 Aug)

252. As noted earlier (para 247 above) Marshal von Kluge planned on calling at Hausser's and Eberbach's battle headquarters on 15 Aug. We do not know whether he was travelling merely to carry out his duty as on any other day, or possibly was looking for a death more merciful than being hanged by Hitler's henchmen (para 257 below). At any rate his car was shot up by fighter planes, his radio senders destroyed and the survivors of the party delayed for hours in chaotic traffic (para 257 below). For almost 24 hours there was no word from the Marshal; nobody knew where he was and how to get in touch with him. Had he been killed or captured? Or was he negotiating a surrender behind the Fuehrer's back?

253. The disappearance of the theatre commander at the most critical moment created an intolerable situation. No doubt a responsible Commander-in-Chief was needed without delay. But to Hitler the incident was probably not without a pleasing aspect; it made it easier to discard another Marshal who had failed him.

254. During the day General Blumentritt kept OKW informed by telephone. O.B. West had left at 0530 hrs; since then there had been no contact. The Army commanders were besieging Army Group B for a major decision. The sole course of action still open was an attack in order to make possible the extrication of some elements. The bottle neck would have to be kept open as wide as possible. A responsible commander would have to be named forthwith; he would need a free hand to save what he could. "It is 5 minutes to 12," said Blumentritt. (W.D. A Gp D, 15 Aug)

255. At 2100 hrs he received the Fuehrer's orders. Nobody was to have a free hand; Eberbach was to attack immediately:

The Fuehrer has ordered:

Until Field Marshal von Kluge has been located on the battle field Col-Gen Hausser will also command Fifth Panzer Army and Group Eberbach.

His order is to attack immediately with Eberbach Group from the West and with 81 Corps from the East to knock out the attacking enemy wedge in the area around the north of Sees, as it threatens to surround the whole of the three Armies. To this end, Fifth Panzer Army must hold on to the area north of Falaise with all its might and must despatch to and bring under command of 81 Corps the infantry divisions which are approaching via Rouen in the form of battle groups.

Seventh Army is to protect the rear of this attack towards the West. Just to what extent they can and must give way towards the East in so doing, depends on the position of their southern flank and on the progress of the attack by Group Eberbach. Insofar as no influence of Col-Gen Hausser on the infantry divisions approaching from the Fifteenth Army exists, they are to be provided with orders directly from the Rear Headquarters of Army Group B.

signed: Adolf Hitler

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports, op cit,
15 Aug, O.B. West Ops No 271/44
2115 hrs 15 Aug, quoting Fuehrer
Order WFSt Ops No. 772887/44 of
1930 hrs 15 Aug)

256.

a chance

While the

Para 256 contained a citation

from Schraeven "Der Westen".

and: It was removed from

this and other copies during

my absence by unknown

hands.

257

While the busy commentators were about
begging for a chance to see their kumys, and Bunsell
was ~~being~~ getting for help, Kater had been clearing a
new O. B. Unit. Adams recorded the event in the
following words:

There is my draft
for the ²⁵⁷ ~~257~~ which
has been removed

On 15 Aug the rain reached a new
climax, as usual, who had gone to the
group. Kater in person, and not the
naked during the white day, after-
reporting at midnight [1915 Aug] that 21
B. O. V. must be recommended north of Falmouth
in the situation there would be unbearable,
and that General Kater had given orders
for defence because attacks was upon the
the moment. One and now to return
with the possibility of the Field Marshal
becoming unbearable. He left at 0220
on 16 Aug the matter was still obscure.
Concerning this possibly, on 15 Aug the
Fraser had called Marshal Kennedy and
Kater to his headquarters to select me
of there on the new O. B. Unit. He per-
Hansen was to recommend H. J. in the interim.

Early on 16 Aug it was reported that
Kater on Kater had reached the headquarters
of General Kater. In the meantime the
situation had deteriorated further since the
Fraser Fraser manifested his decision to
bring about a change in command. Field
Marshal Kater, who had already returned

257
old

to the Army group in the East, was recalled,
and, in the evening of 16 Aug, at the
Flanders headquarters in front of the
Netherlands and the present further developments.

(Schwarzenberg, October, p. 94)

258
PART

from the standpoint of the development
developed in the following manner:

On 15 Aug 44, I reached 116 Div in Luxembourg.
While there I received a written order to meet Gen
Vang in Noy. Although I waited for him for
three hours, he did not come. In the evening,
I received an order from A.G.D. asking what I
knew of the fate of Gen V. I soon afterwards
another radio message was received, this one
stating that Gen V. had been captured. "Next
morning came from Hitler's headquarters: 'Gen
Schwarzenberg Vang, report results hourly.' " It
was then that we made camp, but a meeting
in Vang arrived at my command post. He re-
ported his delay was due to enemy fighter planes
shot up his car and his two radio receivers.
He had also gotten mixed up in the dark night
fog and had personally experienced the danger
situation mentioned previously on the radio message.

(Not sure I was in a position of war camp did I hear
that these messages of the 15th August were
not prompted by an enemy for the personal fate
of Vang, but by the suspicion he might have
a meeting with American officers in order to
report back on matters personally. Through
in verification Hitler had made in the records
he had ascertained that Vang had previous
knowledge of the 20 July 44 incident) ---

257. Seen from Eberbach's point of vantage the Kluge incident developed in the following manner:

On 15 Aug 44, I visited 116 Pz Div in Pommainville. While there I received a wireless order to meet Gen von Kluge in Neçy. Although I waited for him for three hours, he did not come. In the evening, I received an order from A Gp B asking what I knew of the fate of General von Kluge. Soon afterwards another radio enquiry was received, this second message came from Hitler's headquarters: "Ascertain whereabouts Kluge, Report results hourly." The matter gave us much anxiety, but at midnight von Kluge arrived at my command post. The reason for his delay was that enemy fighter bombers had shot up his car and his two radio senders. He had also become involved in the chaotic night traffic and had personally experienced the desperate conditions prevailing on the rear service routes. (Not until I was in a prisoner of war camp did I hear that these enquiries of the High Command were not prompted by anxiety for the personal fate of Kluge, but by the suspicion he might have had a meeting with American officers in order to capitulate or surrender personally. Through investigations Hitler had made in the meantime, he had ascertained that Kluge had previous knowledge of the 20 Jul 44 incident)...

(Pz Gp Eberbach and the Falaise Encirclement, op cit, Transl. p. 23)

Von Kluge returns. Was held up in chaotic Traffic. Tells Jodl Fuehrer Order cannot be carried out. (16 Aug) - Fifth Panzer Army forced to yield further Ground. Canadians take Falaise (16 Aug)

16 Aug

258. The best available source of information on the day's developments in the general area of Falaise is the War Diary of **Fifth Panzer Army**. In substance the following was recorded:

Early in the morning enemy armour and infantry entered St. Pierre sur Dives.

Captured documents show the enemy headed for Livarot - Lisieux.

1 SS Pz Corps was again embroiled in heavy fighting.

Due to the heavy casualties of the last few days resistance can be offered only at individual strongpoints.

At St. Pierre sur Dives the enemy has opened a big gap between 86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps.

The left wing of 86 Corps is now fighting with the front facing southward.

At Falaise the enemy achieved a breach which we were barely able to seal off. But the supply route through Falaise can no longer be used.

17 GAF Div has been placed under command of Fifth Panzer Army. Two of its regiments have arrived and will be committed in the area of Dreux under 81 Corps.

Shortly before noon the commander of 21 Pz Div appeared at Army headquarters, but most of his forces were still west of the Orne. To keep the bottle neck open he wants to commit the Division at the focal point: Morteaux-Couliboeuf. Army concurs.

Towards midday 86 Corps reports enemy penetrations at Airan, Cesny and east of St. Pierre.

At about the same time Field Marshal von Kluge returned from Seventh Army and Group Eberbach. In various telephone conversations with Generals Speidel, Blumentritt and Jodl, the Marshal delineated the situation in the West with the utmost clarity.* Army Group B issued orders that afternoon regarding retirement of Seventh Army and Fifth Panzer Army across the Orne and the conduct of fighting to execute these measures. (para 261 below).

To deal with the thrust of 7 U.S. Armd Div against Dreux and Evreux, 344 Inf Div and 17 GAF Fd Div (since yesterday under the command of the Army) are subordinated to 81 Corps with the proviso that 344 Inf Div be committed between Laigle and Verneuil (para 259 below).

In view of 1 SS Pz Corps' almost untenable position General Kraemer proposes towards evening to establish the main line of resistance for the coming night along NW edge Falaise - northern outskirts Damblainville - northern edge Morteaux-Couliboeuf - northern edge Courcy - Mittois; joining there with 86 Corps.

In the evening hours the enemy succeeded in forcing an entry into Falaise with tanks. Bitter street fighting was raging throughout the night. In the sector of 74 Corps the enemy attacks in the afternoon with tanks and infantry at Oully and Cahan. He succeeds in capturing le Buisson and la Bijade.

*At 1245 hrs 16 Aug von Kluge told Jodl on the telephone:

... a thrust in accordance with the latest Fuhrer Order cannot be carried out

... clinging to a hope that cannot be fulfilled by any power in the world ... including an order to do so ... is a disastrous error. That is the situation!...

(W.D. Fifth Pz Army, Apps, 9 Aug - 9 Sep 44, op cit, Appx 24, Record of tel cons Kluge-Jodl, 1245 hrs 16 Aug 44)

Artillery is thrown in to fire on tanks with their last rounds of ammunition. To reestablish contact with the left neighbour the line Les Loges - Les Isles - Bardel - le Val - northern outskirts of Bréel will be taken back during the night.

The enemy advancing from the South on Laigle and Verneuil has been repulsed.

(Condensed from W.D. Fifth
Pz Army, 16 Aug)

259. 81 Corps had been placed under Fifth Panzer Army in the evening of 14 Aug (Daily Sitreps A Gp B, 14 and 15 Aug). The Corps was to defend the southern approaches to the deep eastern rear area of the retreating German forces. The situation of the Corps on 16 Aug was somewhat obscure. Army Group B reported:

81 Corps

331 Inf Div in line Gacé - Beaufai - Laigle. Enemy attack on Laigle with 45 tanks was repulsed. 14 tanks were disabled.

344 Inf Div Moving up from the Bernay area to the line Laigle - Verneuil... Verneuil under attack. Situation still obscure.

352 Inf Div Situation obscure. Blocking Groups have orders to fall back only under most severe pressure to the line Dreux - Le Boullay - Thierry - Berelieres. According to reports hitherto unconfirmed enemy advancing via Nogent le Roi to Condé [sur Vesgre] as well as towards Houdan. Infantry attack on Rambouillet was repulsed. According to an unconfirmed report American tank near Trappes (west of Versailles).

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 16 Aug)

Hitler countenances Withdrawal of Forces West of Falaise
- Argentan (16 Aug)

260. At 0450 hrs 16 Aug A Gp B had been advised by radio of Marshal von Kluge's arrival at the headquarters of Pz Gp Eberbach (Ibid, 16 Aug). Shortly before noon the Marshal appeared at the headquarters of Fifth Panzer Army (para 258 above). At 1155 hrs he told C. of S. O.B. West on the telephone that the situation of Fifth Panzer Army was deteriorating badly; what he needed was "a free hand".*

*A perceptible slanting during these days of certain entries in the War Diary of Army Group B suggests that Blumentritt was ill-disposed towards von Kluge.

A few hours after the Kluge - Jodl telephone conversation (para 258fn) A Gp D received a Fuehrer Order countenancing a withdrawal of the forces west of the Falaise - Argentan "tube" behind the Orne and subsequently behind the Dives. Falaise was to be held as a corner post; Group Eberbach was to widen the gap by means of an attack in southeasterly direction. (W.D. A Gp D, 16 Aug)

Von Kluge's Withdrawal Order to Fifth Panzer Army (16 Aug)

261. Presumably on the basis of this Fuehrer Order, Marshal von Kluge directed Fifth Panzer Army as follows:

To: Fifth Panzer Army

Intentions:

Once the east bank of the Orne has been reached Fifth Panzer Army and Seventh Army will withdraw without delay to the sector of the Dives and the line Morteaux - Trun - Gacé - Laigle.

The entire withdrawal movement will be carried out under the overall command of the Seventh Army commander.

It will be essential that the bottle-neck is amply covered and maintained in the North and in the South. To this end it may become necessary to despatch a panzer division to the penetration area at St. Pierre.

Pz Gp Eberbach will continue to cover this withdrawal as hitherto in the area Argentan - Gacé and then, after fulfilment of their battle orders be disbanded.

The following order of battle is contemplated once this withdrawal manoeuvre has been completed: Seventh Army takes over the sector from the sea to Laigle, inclusive. Command Post at Fontaine l'Abbaye (until now the Cmd post of Fifth Pz Army HQ)

Gen Pz Tps Eberbach will again assume command of Fifth Panzer Army, command post: South of Vernon, sector: from Laigle to Paris-West.

For the time being, and subject to change, all troops in these areas are brought under command of the Army in their zone. Inter-Army boundary: Beauvais (Fifth) - N.D. de l'Isle - Evreux (Seventh) - Laigle (Seventh) - Alençon (Seventh).

Furthermore, it is intended to bring in the mass of the panzer formations in the wake of the movements of the next few days into the area east of Evreux on both sides of the Eure. Orders for the execution of these intentions may be expected on 18 Aug.

signed: v. Kluge, Field
Marshal

A Gp B, Ops No. 6078/44, 16 Aug
(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps
9 Aug - 9 Sep 44, op cit, Appx
25, 16 Aug 44 [handwritten date
confirmed by typed Index]

Gap almost closed (17 Aug)

17 Aug

262. The day's most significant developments were the deep penetrations at Morteaux-Couliboeuf and Falaise. Clearly the Canadian First Army was straining every nerve to close the gap. 2 Pz Div and 9 SS Pz Div were committed at Morteaux; infantry formations and elements of 21 Pz Div were fighting near Falaise. Seventh Army was withdrawing and Group Eberbach was under growing pressure (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 17 Aug). The situation at the south and west sides of the pocket was somewhat obscure, but a fair account of the situation at the north side was recorded in the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army:

Falaise, the goal for which he had striven so long, was captured by the enemy during the night [16/17 Aug] in bitter street fighting. 1 SS Pz Corps was able to intercept heavy tank attacks in the line Louvagny - Morteaux-Couliboeuf. The lack of ammunition and fuel, as well as the exhaustion of the troops, are steadily getting worse in all units.

In consequence -- as reported by the [Corps'] C. of S. -- by nightfall the Corps will be located in the line Beaumais - Nécy. In order to establish contact with 74 Corps the infantry divisions coming from Seventh Army had to be extended towards the left to 74 Corps.

Towards noon General Gause told Army Group B that in the event of Seventh Army failing to cross the Orne during the night, portions of that Army would unavoidably be cut off. This was due to the situation of 1 SS Pz Corps, where the left wing would have to fall back, during the night to the forest of St. André.

During the morning the enemy resumes

his attack in the centre of 86 Corps for a thrust in the direction of Livarot. He succeeds in advancing past Ste. Marie aux Anglais to the forest north of Les Authieux. In the area of 1 SS Pz Corps the enemy is pressing forward as far as les Moutiers with the obvious intention of closing the ring around Fifth and Seventh Armies.

In order to avoid the threatening break through of the enemy at Morteaux-Couliboef -- and thus the closing of the cauldron -- the Chief of Staff [Fifth Panzer Army] at 1800 hrs proposes to Field Marshal von Kluge the immediate despatch of two panzer divisions from Group Eberbach to 1 SS Pz Corps. General Gause said that an attack towards the North by these two panzer divisions was the sole possible way of keeping the bottle neck open. General Gause requests again that Seventh Army be taken across the Orne in one fell swoop. This possibility had been discussed earlier between General Gause and the Operations Officer of Seventh Army. Field Marshal von Kluge thereupon authorized the execution of the proposal and issues orders in that sense.

At 1915 hrs 86 Corps reports its left wing at Beauvatel without contact with 1 SS Pz Corps. The enemy is at present exacting pressure with substantial forces near Ste. Marie aux Anglais and les Authieux. In the case of attacks on larger scale the Corps will take the left wing to Coupesarte.

C. of S. 1 SS Pz Corps reports in the course of the evening that he has issued orders for the Corps to seal off on the line: Mittois - Ammeville - Grand Mesnil les Moutiers - Beaumais - la Hogette - Bois de St. Andre. The Corps to hold this line in spite of the serious exhaustion of the troops and the lack of fuel. But [as a condition sine qua non] 86 Corps must definitely make contact near Mittois. Fifth Panzer advises in this connection, that before the night is over two panzer divisions will be despatched to seal off the break-in at Morteaux-Couliboef.

As the supply of ammunition and fuel with vehicle columns is no longer possible through the narrow gap south of Falaise, during the coming night Group Eberbach will be provided for by air.

Now, as for days past, the prevailing clear and sunny weather favours the incessant commitment of the enemy Air Force, thus making our own large scale movements by day possible only at the cost of heavy casualties.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 17 Aug)

263. In connection with the projected dissolution of Panzer Group Eberbach after its withdrawal from the pocket, 2 SS Pz Corps had received orders in the morning of 17 Aug for a quick move to Lisieux. But with the pressure on Trun growing decidedly worse during the day the Corps was directed to make a stand at Trun and keep the gap from being closed. This development has been described in the post-war narrative of General Eberbach:

On the morning of 17 Aug 44, II SS Pz Corps and the projector brigades received orders to proceed immediately to Lisieux as a reserve for A Gp B. The fuel necessary for this move had arrived during the night before. Transfer of these units meant that gaps in the front on both sides of Argentan which had just been filled were to be open again. I had nothing with which to close them. After a few hours, a new order arrived for II SS Pz Corps. The enemy had taken Falaise and the Corps was now to go into battle position near Vimoutiers as soon as possible. They were to march during the day regardless of losses. As the Corps had lost all of its larger radio stations, it was difficult for Gen Bittrich to transmit the new orders to his divisions. At last, however, he succeeded in doing it and the Corps was set on the march to Vimoutiers during the day and undoubtedly would suffer heavy losses from enemy fighter bombers. Late in the afternoon, when the Corps was on the march and only the commanding general was still present, this third order came: "Enemy has broken through southeast of Falaise and is pushing on Trun. II SS Pz Corps throws enemy back and holds Trun." Would Bittrich be able to reach his division commanders? The radio stations which were available had been dismantled and it was difficult to drive on the utterly congested roads. Bittrich, however, immediately set out personally in an attempt to reach his division commanders. (I learned later that this attempt had failed.) At the same time, 116 Pz Div reported that the enemy had overthrown the weak security detachments which had replaced 2 SS Pz Div east of Argentan and had taken Le Bourg, St Léonard, and, further, that Chambois was impassable because of the heavy enemy artillery fire. A rumor reached us that Trun had been taken by British troops. The gap for the retreat of Seventh Army had a breadth of only ten kilometers!

(Pz Gp Eberbach and the Falaise Encirclement, op cit, Transl pp. 24-25)

Von Kluge replaced by Model (17 Aug)

264. In the evening of 17 Aug Field Marshal Model appeared at the headquarters of Army Group B, presented a letter from Hitler and relieved Marshal von Kluge. The moment was not a propitious one. Within hours his Armies might be

crushed. Would he succeed in extricating worthwhile forces from the grasp of the raging enemy? And if so, were they not merely being preserved, perhaps, for other feats of paranoic strategy?

265. According to laconic entries in the War Diary of Army Group D, Headquarters Army Group B was informed of the impending change in command at 1900 hrs 17 Aug. Barely one hour later Marshal Model turned up at La Roche Guyon. In the absence of more detailed contemporary evidence, Zimmermann's version of the surrounding circumstances is being quoted below:

On 17 Aug 44 Genfldm Model arrived entirely unexpectedly at the command post of A Gp B and delivered to Genfldm von Kluge a handwritten message from Adolf Hitler. Its content was approximately as follows: Hitler was convinced Von Kluge had undertaken too much during the previous weeks and was in need of a rest. He had therefore decided to appoint Genfldm Model simultaneously C-in-C. West and Cmdr, A Gp B. (What motives actually led to the removal of Von Kluge remains a matter for speculation, since at the time I lacked knowledge of the matter.)

The OB WEST Chief of Staff, Gen Blumentritt, drove once more to La Roche Guyon to take leave of Genfldm von Kluge and report to Genfldm Model. I do not know exactly the details of what was discussed there. In later conversations it was revealed that Von Kluge was very grievously affected by his unexpected relief and could not bear the thought of having to leave his struggling troops in the Falaise Pocket just at this critical moment. He is supposed to have intimated that as a German field marshal, who had warned and warned against the Avranches counter-attack only to be made responsible before the whole world by Hitler for its failure, and who now must needs "go home" while his brave troops were dying in the Pocket, he could not go on living. (If other matters, such as knowledge of or participation in the 20 Jul 44 incident, played a role--as was rumored-- and if so to what extent, I am unable to state.) To all accounts outwardly very calm and collected, he turned over all his affairs to Genfldm Model and drove off in a car (apparently on 18 Aug 44) in the direction of Metz. At the German border he ended his life by taking potassium cyanide. (It was subsequently learned that prior to his departure Von Kluge had written and dispatched a letter to Adolf Hitler in which he implored him, in view of the hopelessness of the military situation to try bringing about a compromise with the Western Allies, so as to save at least the German East.)

(A Study in Command, pp. 152-153)

Von Kluge dies. Leaves Letter for Hitler: If new Weapons ineffective War must be terminated (18 Aug)

18 Aug

266. With the approval of OKW, the headquarters staff of O.B. West was moving on 17 and 18 Aug to Verzy (SE Reims). At the same time the second echelon of this staff was setting up new headquarters at Metz (Ibid, p. 154). According to Speidel, Marshal von Kluge left la Roche Guyon at 1700 hrs 18 Aug (Speidel, op cit, p. 137). According to Jodl's Diary Notes the Field Marshal was dead when his plane reached Metz (Jodl, op cit, p. 37). As we know, the Marshal left behind a letter, dated 18 Aug, in which he summarized for Hitler the reasons which had inevitably led to the collapse of the German front in Normandy. He wrote it would have been impossible to prevent the breakthrough at Avranches; the counter-attack at Mortain ordered by Hitler against his advice had had a decidedly adverse effect on the position of the Army Group; if the new weapons proved to have no effect the war must be ended (Speidel, op cit). A full translation of this letter appears as Appendix "L" to the present report.

267. At 0900 hrs Marshal Model appeared at the battle headquarters of Fifth Panzer Army for a conference with Dietrich, Eberbach, Kuntzen (81 Corps), Gause and von Gersdorff. The Marshal said it was most important to re-establish a coherent front. Seventh Army and Panzer Group Eberbach must be extricated as quickly as possible (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 18 Aug). Shoring up the walls of the escape corridor was to be carried out by the following:

towards the North: by 2 SS Pz Corps with
2 SS Pz Div
9 SS Pz Div
21 Pz Div
12 SS Pz Div;

towards the South: by 47 Pz Corps with
2 Pz Div and
116 Pz Div

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps
9 Aug - 9 Sep 44, op cit, Appx
3724, Notes on Conference with
Field Marshal Model, 18 Aug 44)

268. At the time of the conference 2 SS Pz Corps (then consisting of the remnants of 2 SS Pz Div and 9 SS Pz Div) was already past the line of the encirclement in the making. But with escape from carnage almost within reach the Corps was ordered to keep the gap open and restore contact with Seventh Army (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 18 Aug) and to this end all elements of 1 SS Pz Corps south of the line Morteaux-Coulli-boeuf-Grand Mesnil - Vimoutiers were placed under 2 SS Pz Corps. But by 1800 hrs all hopes of keeping the escape corridor open seemed to have been dashed, and General Gause asked Army Group B for an order instructing Seventh Army to attempt with all forces an immediate break-through towards Vimoutiers. Tomorrow such an attempt would be possible only at great cost. Today some vehicles might still be saved; tomorrow this would no longer be possible. "Such an order, however, was not received from Army Group B". (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 18 Aug)

Encirclement complete (German Version) (18 Aug)

269. As we know, actual contact between the northern and southern Allied spearheads was not established before the evening of 19 Aug. To the Germans, however, the encirclement seemed to be complete on 18 Aug:

. . . During the afternoon and evening, however, the enemy succeeds in advancing past Trun and past Argentan with strong forces and in completing a still loose encirclement of Seventh Army and Panzer Group Eberbach . . .

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 18 Aug)

. . . he succeeded in advancing past Trun to St. Lambert, where he established contact with the enemy forces from the south which had broken through at the edge of the wooded area east of Argentan [about 2 kms south of Chambois]. Thus he has closed the bottle neck, though for the moment presumably only with light forces.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 18 Aug)

2 SS Pz Corps unable to re-open Gap from Outside. Seventh Army will try to break out on 20 Aug (19 Aug)

19 Aug

270. On this day the headquarters staff of Fifth Panzer Army moved to Canteleu, near Rouen; no other fact was recorded in the war diary of the Army (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 19 Aug). 86 Corps was trying to make a stand on the line Loup - Montville - Lecaude - Lessard - Buché. Allied forces had driven a wedge between 86 Corps and 1 SS Pz Corps; and Livarot was under attack. 2 SS Pz Corps' projected thrust on Trun failed to get under way; fuel was lacking, air attacks were fierce, roads were congested. In the ranks of Seventh Army constant enemy artillery fire was inflicting heavy casualties. 2 SS Pz Corps had been unable to re-open the escape corridor. The Seventh Army decided to attempt a break-out at Chambois on the next day. La Roche Guyon had been under fire since 0600 hrs; upstream and downstream Allied forces had reached the Seine; the headquarters staff of Army Group B was moving to W2, Hitler's western headquarters at Margival, near Soissons (W.D. A Gp D, 19 Aug; A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 19 Aug). Communications were badly disturbed; Seventh Army was in mortal danger; there was little time for keeping diaries.

271. As a forerunner to a directive that would be forthcoming on 20 Aug (para 278 below), the Fuehrer listed the immediate tasks in the West in their order of importance:

- (a) prevent Seine crossings south of Paris;
- (b) prevent enemy from advancing northwards along the bank of the Seine;
- (c) maintain bridgehead west of Paris to safeguard withdrawal of Nineteenth Army.

(W.D. A Gp D, 19 Aug)

272. The Fuehrer now shifted his attention to the problem of future strategy and the replenishment of the decimated Armies in the West. Twenty five new divisions would be required for the West within one to two months. About 100,000 men were to be called up in the homeland, 60,000 men were to be supplied by the air force. 105 and 106 Pz Bdes, as well as ten artillery brigades, were to be brought in from the East. Plans were to be made for offensive operations to begin in November. Special attention was to be given the question of fuel; enemy fuels were to be examined even now in order to establish how the Germans could use them to best advantage. (Jodl, Diary Notes, p. 36, 19 Aug 44)

Seventh Army in dire Straits. Five Hour Battle at St. Lambert opens Way for Escape of some Battle Groups. Arms and Equipment lost (20 Aug)

20 Aug

273. For Seventh Army it was now "do or die". Casualties from air attacks and artillery fire were very heavy. One by one the few remaining radio senders were knocked out, and Army Group B in consequence received little information on the developments in the critical sector. By midnight, however, it was established that almost half of the encircled forces had been able to save their naked lives if not their arms and their equipment.

274. According to the lone entry for the day in the war diary of Fifth Panzer Army, Seventh Army was placed under its command during the day and Fifth Panzer Army made responsible for the front from the sea to the right boundary of First Army [at Poissy] (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 20 Aug). This decision may have been a result of Seventh Army's generally unpromising situation and of the fact that the commander of Seventh Army had been reported missing in action. Actually General Hausser had been severely wounded, but this did not become known until he turned up on the next day with a battle group that had been able to fight its way through to 2 SS Pz Corps (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 20 and 21 Aug).

275. 2 SS Pz Corps' advance to meet Seventh Army was moderately successful, it came to a halt south of Camembert and le Vigan. The day's big action was carried out by Seventh Army:

In the early morning hours of 20 Aug, Seventh Army, with 2 Para Corps and Pz Gp Eberbach leading, and 74 and 84 Corps following, embarked on the break out towards the Northeast and North. At first the attack failed to make headway, but after a dashing attack by 3 Para Div it was possible to break out at St. Lambert and southeast of Trun, advance along the enemy's front and enlarge the gap to an extent allowing one to reckon with the extrication of 74 and 84 Corps. Due to the heavy air attacks and the lack of fuel the bulk of the vehicles, guns and heavy weapons was lost.....

In embittered close-in fighting about 40-50 per cent of the encircled forces managed to break out and join hands with 2 SS Pz Corps. At St. Lambert sur Dives the battle for a breach lasted for five hours.

Losses in materiel were very high because during the last three days enemy fighter-bombers had fired nearly all vehicles and fuel reserves, and the artillery guns had been destroyed by fire concentrations from the enemy's heavy artillery. Gradually the Army lost all its radio stations and thus became unable to carry out its command functions. The performance of the troops who broke out was of high calibre....

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 20 Aug)

276. Schramm recorded the loss of nearly all heavy equipment, but rated the break-out as one of the campaigns's great feats of arms (Schramm, p. 115). Freiherr von Gersdorff, Seventh Army's Chief of Staff at the time, in response to a question put to him in October 1945 during his confinement, stated in writing:

... The main losses, however, especially the material losses, were not incurred during the break-through, but before, on 18 and 19 Aug. The Allied air operations on 18 Aug and the particularly heavy artillery fire on 19 Aug destroyed the bulk of the Army's vehicles, so that at the break-out only the men were present. Most of the artillery was destroyed before the break-through. Of the specially formed combat groups that made the breaks, I was personally in command of the group which made the breach at St. Lambert. Fifth Panzer Army then assumed command, as my staff had lost most of its officers and was no longer fit for action....

(von Gersdorff, Normandy, Cobra and Mortain, op cit, pp. 13 - 14)

277. Of the general circumstances surrounding the last escapes from the encirclement General Eberbach supplies the following account:

...The attack of 2 SS Pz Corps was to begin the night of 19/20 Aug. On the afternoon of 19 Aug, I visited Bittrich again. He still had no fuel and had received very insufficient quantities of ammunition. Despite this, he hoped to be ready for action in the evening. Additional fuel, however, arrived in the early morning, but it was several hours before it was distributed and tanked. Army Group was urging us on. The two divisions [2 SS Pz Div and 9 SS Pz Div] were ready to fall in by about 1000 hrs 20 Aug. They were able to move only because of the bad weather which hindered the operations of the enemy air force.

Both divisions had a combined total of only 20 tanks. One of the divisions possessed only one battalion of infantry while the other one had two. One road of advance was packed with burned out vehicles to such an extent that tanks had to clear an alley before it was passable. As far as I can remember, one battle group of one division advanced along the route Vimoutiers - Trun and the other one along the road Camembert - St. Lambert. At first the advance made good progress. It came to a stop, however, in front of a range of hills (Hills 258 south of Champeaux, 240 at Ecouches and 262 north of Coudehard). In the afternoon, the range of hills was taken. After that, the advance made practically no more progress. Yet, in spite of this, a gap was forced into the encirclement and the first 2,000 men who succeeded in getting out of the encirclement joined the battle group of the Divisions. During the rest of the day and throughout the night, soldiers with and without arms streamed out of the encirclement. Altogether, about 50 guns and 25 tanks might also have gotten out. The achievement of the units forcing the "breakthrough" was a great one. Nevertheless, as a force they could be used no more. Almost the whole armament of the Seventh Army -- tanks, guns, radio stations, motor vehicles, and substantial parts of trains and supplies -- were lost. Even the number of rescued machine guns was insignificant. The number of men who got out after the ring had been closed can be estimated at about 20,000.

(Pz Gp Eberbach and the Falaise Encirclement, op cit, transl pp. 26-27)

Hitler Directive for Operations in the immediate Future (20 Aug)

278. During the afternoon Hitler's directive for the further conduct of operations was received by A Gp D and relayed to A Gp B (A Gp B, Misc Fuehrer Orders, op cit, O.B. West (A Gp D) Ops No. 745/44, 20 Aug, quoting full text of Fuehrer Order WFSt Ops No. 772956/44, 20 Aug 44)(Photostat 981AGpB(D2)). A translation of this order appears as Appendix "M" to the present report. Briefly stated, Hitler directed O.B. West:

to hold the bridgehead west of Paris;

to prevent an enemy breakthrough between Seine and Loire towards Dijon;

to reform the two badly battered Armies behind the Touques sector, armour on the south flank;

if area forward of Seine could not be held, to fall back to and defend the line Seine - Yonne - Canal de Bourgogne - Dijon - Dol - Swiss border (but Paris bridgehead to be held).

(loc cit)

Counting the pitiful Remnants of the armoured Divisions
(21 and 22 Aug)

21 Aug

279. Though using different expressions, Schramm and Eberbach leave no doubt that they considered the escape from the pocket a noteworthy feat of arms (paras 276 and 277). This may be true enough, but it may also be fair to add that the troops were aflame with the courage of desperation, and the number of men who did break-out may have been somewhat smaller than the figure of 20,000 suggested by Eberbach. Research at some later time may furnish an authenticated figure. At the time of writing, however, it can only be said that the few infantry divisions in the pocket seem to have been almost wiped out, and that it would be a surprise to find that many more than 5000 men from the armoured formations succeeded in getting away. Reporting to OKW on 22 Aug and 23 Aug (for 22 Aug) A Gp D supplied the following estimates of remaining armoured strength:

- ✓ 10 SS Pz Div four weak infantry battalions,
no tanks, no artillery;
- 12 SS Pz Div 300 men, 10 tanks, no artillery;
- ✓ 1 SS Pz Div weak infantry elements,
no tanks, no artillery;
- ✓ 2 Pz Div one infantry battalion,
no tanks, no artillery;
- ✓ 2 SS Pz Div 450 men, 15 tanks, 6 arty pieces;
- ✓ 9 SS Pz Div 460 men, 20-25 tanks, 20 arty pieces;
- ✓ 116 Pz Div one battalion, 12 tanks,
approximately two batteries;
- ✓ 21 Pz Div four weak battalions,
10 tanks, artillery unknown
(sitrep 23 Aug for 22 Aug)

(G.M.D.S.- H22/59, O.B. West, Daily
Sitreps 25 Jul-31 Aug 44 (981CW
(D30)) Sitreps for 21 and 22 Aug 44)

Successive Defence Lines for the Withdrawal to the
Seine (21 Aug)

280. The day's most significant developments are cited below in the form of paraphrased excerpts from the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army:

... On the left wing of 272 Inf Div strong enemy armoured forces succeeded in advancing to the area 1 km south of Lisieux.

... in support of embattled 86 Corps 9 SS Pz Div was moved to Lisieux with orders to hold that place.

... in the afternoon 81 Corps' main line of resistance was torn open between Dreux and Verneuil by two armoured divisions.

... acting on instructions from the Army Group, Fifth Panzer Army towards midday issued orders for a withdrawal to the line Deauville - Lisieux - Orbec - Laigle.

... in view of the precarious situation of the Army's southern front (81 Corps), general Gause suggests to Army Group the preparation of artillery rear positions above and below Rouen.

Towards 2200 hrs General Gause notified the various Corps of the successive lines to which the Army might withdraw "under certain circumstances":

First Line:	Honfleur - Cormeilles - Bernay - Verneuil
Second Line:	Crosley - Conches - Normancourt
Third Line:	Vieux Port - Amfreville - Evreux - Foisy-la-Bataille
Fourth Line:	Seine.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 21 Aug)

281. Earlier in the evening Marshal Model supplied OKW with a special situation report. The remnants of Seventh Army were to be rushed to the Beauvais - Seules area and reorganized there by H.Q. 58 Res Pz Corps -- in the event of a major insurrection Paris could not be held -- Fifth Panzer Army now in command from west of Paris to the sea. During the night 21/22 Aug the line Lisieux - Glos - Orbec - Laigle would be occupied. 18 GAF Div and 49 Inf Div were being rushed in to seal off the enemy north of the Seine between Vernon and Meulan. Subsequently this enemy bridgehead would be eliminated. Armoured forces were to be concentrated near Evreux to reestablish ultimately contact on the south shore of the Seine with the forces at Paris. (A Gp B, Misc Fuehrer Orders, op cit, Field Marshal Model, A Gp B, Ops No. 6390/44 1800 hrs 21 Aug 44) (Photostat 981AGpB(D2)) Hitler's reply, signed "Jodl, by order", arrived shortly afterwards in the form of an order dictated over the telephone. Apparently Hitler mistrusted Model too, for the order was in substance a pointed reiteration of the earlier directive and of what Model had just reported as his intentions. (Ibid, WFSt/Opx No. 772974/44, 1930 hrs 21 Aug 44)

282. During the day OKW notified O.B. West of the new forces being marshalled for the subsequent phases of the fighting in France. 3 Pz Gren Div and 15 Pz Gren Div were to be moved in quickly from the Italian theatre of war. A number of other formations and units would become available at the beginning of September (Ibid, O.B. West, Ops No. 6894/44, 21 Aug 44, quoting OKW/WFSt/Opx (A) West No. 0010144/44, of 21 Aug 44). Reading the roster of what would become available in September was unlikely to give much aid and comfort to a front commander.

Fighting Strength of Fifth Panzer Army (25 Aug)

283. Allied efforts to reduce the German bridgehead south of the Seine were progressing apace, but another week was to pass before the last covering units of Fifth Panzer Army crossed the Seine near Rouen. On 25 Aug Fifth Panzer Army recorded its fighting strength. Of two proud Armies the following was left:

17,980 infantry,
314 pieces of artillery,
42 tanks and assault guns.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps 9 Aug -
9 Sep 44, op cit, Appx 50, 25 Aug 44)

284. The German forces in Normandy had been crushed, but Hitler would fight on. Some noteworthy engagements took place during the Panzer Army's last week south of the Seine. On the whole, however, main interest in this period attaches to the high level decisions and directives setting at that time the stage and pattern for the subsequent phase of the fighting in the West. For this reason the pertinent German source material will be dealt with in the continuation to the present report.

285. This report has been prepared by Capt. A.G. Steiger, Historical Section (G.S.).

A. G. Steiger, Capt.

for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director
Historical Section (G.S.)

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APPENDICES

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GERMAN PERSONAL NAMES

BITTRICH, Willi, SS Obergruppenfuehrer und General der Waffen SS, Cmdr 2 SS Pz Corps till 29 Jun 44, Cmdr Seventh Army from 29 Jun 44:

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BLUMENTRITT, Guenther, Gen Inf, C. of S. O.B. West 24 Sep 42-10 Sep 44:

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BORGMANN, Lt Col, Army Adjutant to Hitler:

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von BUTTLAR, Horst, (Freiherr Treusch von Buttlar-Brandenfels, Horst), Maj Gen, Chief of Army Operations OKW/WFSt:

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CANARIS, Wilhelm, Admiral, (German Intelligence):

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DOLMANN, Friedrich, Col Gen (Died 28 Jun 44):

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GUDERIAN, Heinz Wilhelm, Col Gen, Inspector General of Panzer Troops, from 22 Jul 44 also Acting Chief of the Army General Staff:

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HARMEL, Heinz, SS Standartenfuehrer (later SS Brigadefuehrer), Cmdr 10 SS Pz Div:

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HAUBENREISSER, Dr, Generalstabsarzt [Lt Gen], Chief Medical Officer A Gp D

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HAUSSER, Paul, SS Obergruppenfuehrer und General der Waffen SS, Cmdr 2 SS Pz Corps till 29 Jun 44, Cmdr Seventh Army from 29 Jun 44:

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HEUSINGER, Adolf, Chief of Army Operations OKH, Author of "Befehl im Widerstreit":

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981HC(D26)	OKW, Sit Maps France, 1944	147, 160, 228
981.004(D2)	OKH, Sit Maps West (Incl Sit Map 6 Jun 44)	21, 41
981A7(D2)	Seventh Army Sit Map 5 Jun 44	21
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981PA5(D1)	Fifth Panzer Army W.D. 10 Jun - 8 Aug 44	49, 112, 114, 115, 125, 139, 143, 147, 156, 164, 166, 170, 173, 174, 182, 185, 187, 189, 196, 201, 211, 218, 220, 222
981PA5(D2)	Fifth Panzer Army W.D. 9 Aug - 9 Sep 44	227, 232, 235, 238, 240, 244, 249, 255, 262, 267, 268, 269, 270, 274, 280
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981S.008(D8)	Seventh Army, W.D. 6-30 Jun 44 U.S. Translation Vol I	65, 114, 115
981S.008(D8)	Seventh Army, W.D. 6 Jun - 31 Jul 44 U.S. Translation Vol II	10, 23, 31, 33, 34, 39, 52, 64, 91, 97, 110, 116, 117, 121
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<u>Fifteenth Army</u>		
981A15(D1)	Fifteenth Army W.D. June 1944	8, 24, 44, 54, 54fn, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 88, 93, 95, 98, 100, 199fn
<u>SS Documents</u> (from Himmler's Personal Files)		
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B. Secondary Sources

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981SOM(D125)	Bittrich, 2 SS Pz Corps, 29 Jun - 24 Jul	84
981SOM(D129)	von Criegern, 84 Corps in Normandy	33, 34, 47, 50
981SOM(D123)	Eberbach, Report on the Fighting of Panzer Group West (Fifth Panzer Army), 3 Jul - 9 Aug 44 (cited: Eberbach Report) (German and English)	128, 131, 150, 162, 181, 207
981SOM(D124)	Eberbach, Panzer Group Eberbach and the Falaise Encirclement (German and English)	231, 246, 263, 277
981SOM(D118)	von Gersdorff, Normandy, Cobra and Mortain, Replies to Questions submitted	193, 276

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981SOM(D54)	Geyr von Schweppenburg, Pz Gp West, Mid 43 - 5 Jul 44 (German and English)	32, 33, 49, 128,
981SOM(D128)	Kuntzen, 81 Corps (German and English)	42fn, 43, 98
981SOM(D97)	Richter, 716 Inf Div in Normandy (Narrative and contem- porary Report) (German and English)	19, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 34fn, 64fn
981SOM(D116)	Staubwasser, The Enemy Picture as seen by A Gp B before the Invasion (German and English)	11
981SOM(D134)	Voigtsberger, 116 Pz Div 16 Jun - 12 Aug 44	161fn
981SOM(D94)	Zimmermann, OB West from Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line (cited: A Study in Command)	12, 15, 35, 38, 119, 128, 129, 130, 164

Magazines

"Historia" La Revue Vivante du Passé	37
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L

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Heusinger,
Befehl im Widerstreit
(Command in Conflict)

169fn

Speidel,
Invasion 1944

35, 36, 99, 101,
116, 157, 169fn,
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APPENDIX "A"
to H.S. Report No. 50

Naval Group West

Account of Invasion Alert

6 Jun 44

981NGPW(D2)

Ref: Para 9

"Foreign Armies West"

Brief Estimate of the Enemy Situation West

6 Jun 44

981HC(D30)

Ref: Para 45

Dietrich promoted Col-Gen

1 Sep 44

(as of 20 Apr 42)

981SS(D2)

Ref: Para 51

Waffen SS Ranks
and
Corresponding German Army Ranks

Ref: Para 51

NOTES

This Appendix is best read with the last page folded outward.

The German army comprised hundreds of different types of units and staffs. A simple method of showing any combination of the resulting multitude of organizational data would save time for all concerned. To achieve this end the Germans made use of their system of military symbols.*

12 SS Pz Div's Order of Battle Sheet has been chosen for the purpose of illustrating the method because it conveys at the same time a picture of the strong and well equipped Division offering the main resistance to the Canadian advance in Normandy.

The explanations set forth in the following are correct in substance but subject to amendment in some details. The available detailed information was partly incomplete and partly contradictory, particularly so as to terminology. It is believed, moreover, that the divisional commander entered the battle with an order of battle changed in some respects to make use of the lessons learned in Russia. Suggestions for amendments will be received gratefully.

* Basic information on German military symbols has been supplied in Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 41, op cit, Appx "E".

Rommel's Map Studies

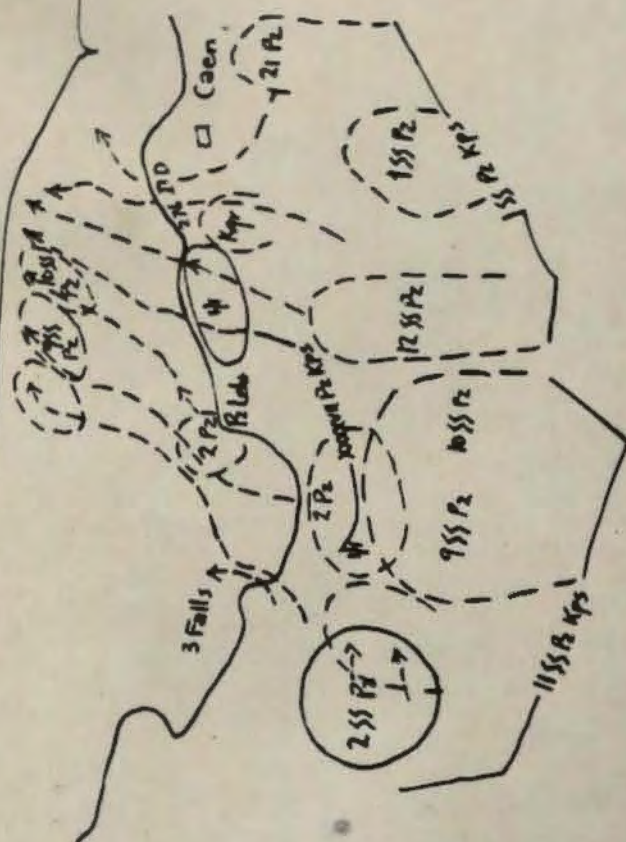
for

- (a) Driving a Wedge between
British and American
Forces
- (b) Coping with a Thrust
Falaise - Paris

981PA5(D4)

Ref: Para 102

Studie II



APPENDIX "H"
to H.S. Report No. 50

Von Geyr's Plan
for
Broad Attack in Direction of Bayeux

26 Jun

981PA5(D5)

Ref: Para 112

Panzer Group West
Ops No. 111/44

26 Jun 44

To: Army Group B

Basic proposal of Panzer Group for
the conduct of the attack is :

- (1) The objective must be fixed as distant as possible. It is a matter of defeating 1 USA Army first of all as the weaker element.

We are aiming at an offensive method of defense against the Second British Army.

This depends upon the situation at that moment as to available forces of the Divisions concerned, particularly with regard to infantry strengths.

- (2) At first an attack with the objective "heights on either side of Bayeux" is to be considered. The ultimate goal can only be decided on the battlefield.
- (3) The actual extent to which enemy naval artillery can be eliminated will be the criterion for the success and following up of the attack.

It is further presumed that our own Luftwaffe will be committed, not for special targets at sea, but in accordance with the wishes of the Panzer Group in complete day and night support of the attack.

- (4) Timing : Night attack. Stand to about one hour before nightfall.
- (5) Commitment of forces : The attack must be initiated with grenadiers on foot, followed immediately by the Panzer formations. In view of the present relative strength of friend and foe it cannot, however, be estimated that the attack in the first night will gain more than about 8 km terrain at the utmost. We will strive, as far as possible, to penetrate in one fell swoop.

The Infantry Divisions which are committed at the outset of the attack in the front line will subsequently be employed without delay to clean up and hold the ground gained.

- (6) Broad outlines of proposal for the operation of the attack on the basis of appreciation of terrain and enemy emerge from the accompanying map, 1:200000.

sgd. Baron von Geyr

For true copy :

sgd. Erlenwein.

Anlage 1 zu
Panzergruppe West
Abt. Ia Nr. 111/44 g.Kdos.Ch

Geheime Kommandosache

Chefsache

H.Qu., den 26.6.44

Desa

Obkdo, H.Gr.B

Vorschlag der Panzergruppe über die Grundlagen der Angriffsführung ist:

1.) Das Ziel muß so weit wie möglich gesteckt werden.

Es gilt, zunächst die 1. amerik. Armee als die schwächere zu schlagen.

Eine offensive Abwehr gegen die 2. engl. Armee wird angestrebt.

Sie ist von den uns diese Zeit verfügbaren Kräften der in Frage kommenden Divisionen, besonders der Grenadierlage, abhängig.

2.) Es kommt zunächst ein Angriff mit dem Ziel "Höhen beiderseits Bayeux" in Frage.

Über das Endziel kann erst auf dem Gefechtsfeld entschieden werden.

3.) Maßgebend für das Gelingen und die Weiterführung des Angriffes ist das tatsächlich erreichte Maß der Ausschaltung der feindl. Schiffsartillerie.

Es wird ferner vorausgesetzt, daß die eigene Luftwaffe nicht auf Sonderziele zur See, sondern nach den Wünschen der Panzergruppe Nacht und Tag voll zur Unterstützung des Angriffs eingesetzt wird.

4.) Zeitpunkt: Nachtangriff. Antreten etwa 1 Stunde vor Einbruch der Dunkelheit.

5.) Krafteinsatz:

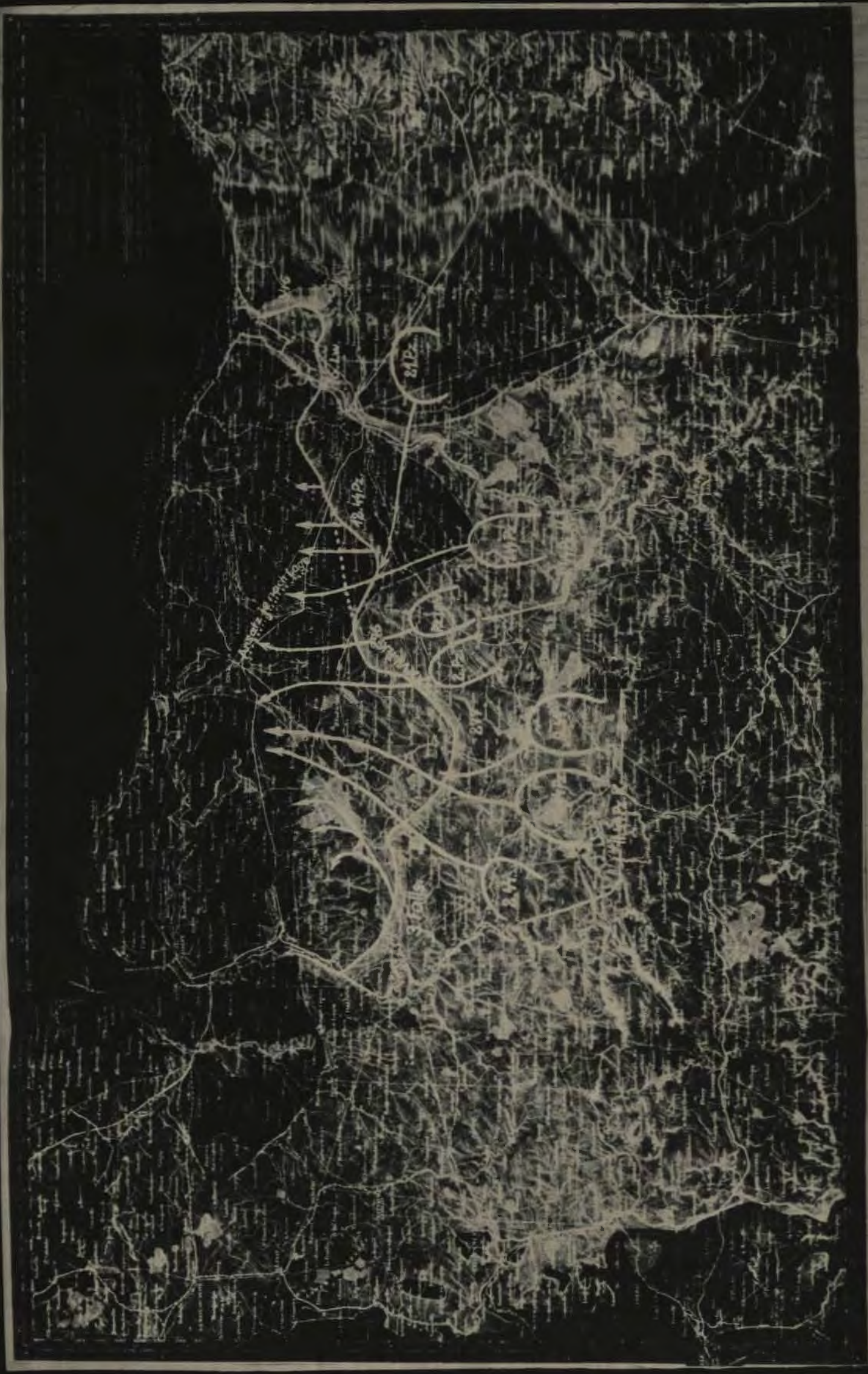
Der Angriff muß mit abgesessenen Grenadiern begonnen werden, denen die Panzer-Verbände unmittelbar folgen. Auf Grund des derzeitigen Kräfteverhältnisses ist jedoch nicht damit zu rechnen, daß der Angriff in der ersten Nacht mehr als höchstens etwa 1 km Boden gewinnt. Angestrebt wird, so weit wie möglich in einem Zuge durchzustoßen.

Die bei Angriffsbeginn in vorderer Linie eingesetzten Inf.-Diversionen sofort nachgezogen, um das gewonnene Gelände zu säubern und zu verteidigen.

6.) Vorschlag über Führung des Angriffs in Großen
auf Grund der Gelände- und Feindbeurteilung geht aus beigefügter Karte 1:200000 hervor.

gez. Frhr. v. Geyr

F. d. R. d. A.



APPENDIX "H"
to H.S. Report No. 50

Von Geyr's Plan
for
Broad Attack in Direction of Bayeux

26 Jun

981PA5(D5)

Ref: Para 112

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Ops No. 111/44

26 Jun 44

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sgd. Baron von Geyr

For true copy :

sgd. Erlenwein.

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Panzergruppe West
Abt. Ia Nr. 111/44 G.Kdos.Ch

Geheime Kommandosache

Chefsache

H.Qu., den 26.6.44

Dem

Obkdo. H.Gr.B

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Eine offensive Abwehr gegen die 2. engl. Armee wird angestrebt.

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- 3.) Maßgebend für das Gelingen und die Weiterführung des Angriffes ist das tatsächlich erreichte Maß der Ausschaltung der feindl. Schiffsartillerie.

Es wird ferner vorausgesetzt, daß die eigene Luftwaffe nicht auf Sonderziele zur See, sondern nach den Wünschen der Panzergruppe Nacht und Tag voll zur Unterstützung des Angriffs eingesetzt wird.

- 4.) Zeitpunkt: Nachtangriff. Antreten etwa 1 Stunde vor Einbruch der Dunkelheit.

- 5.) Kraftansatz:

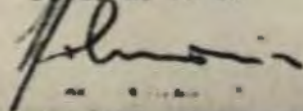
Der Angriff muß mit abgesessenen Grenadiern begonnen werden, denen die Panzer-Verbände unmittelbar folgen. Auf Grund des derzeitigen Kraftverhältnisses ist jedoch nicht damit zu rechnen, daß der Angriff in der ersten Nacht mehr als höchstens etwa 3 km Boden gewinnt. Angestrebt wird, so weit wie möglich in einen Zuge durchzustößen.

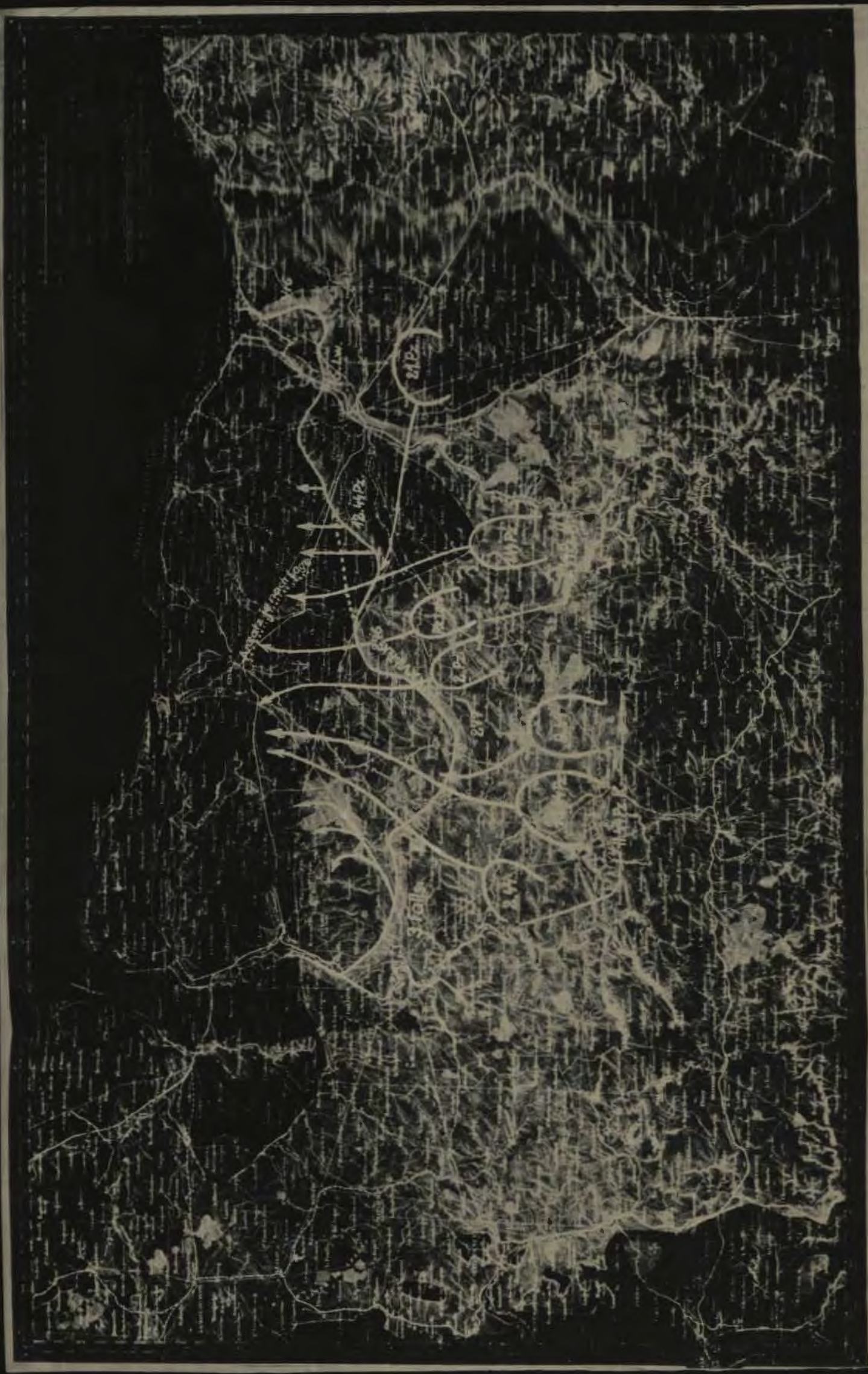
Die bei Angriffsbeginn in vorderer Linie eingesetzten Inf.-Div werden sofort nachgezogen, um das gewonnene Gelände zu säubern und zu verteidigen.

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auf Grund der Gelände- und Feindbeurteilung geht aus beigefügter Karte 1:200000 hervor.

gez. Fhr. v. G e y r

F. d. R. d. A.





Von Geyr Proposes Withdrawal

to Line

Caen South - Caumont

30 Jun

981PA5(D5)

Ref: Para 120

Teletype

To: Seventh Army

(for information : to Army Group B)

1. The situation at Caen and West of it demands basically new decisions. They must be clear sighted and realistic. No doubt the enemy intends using his superiority in materiel to wear down the panzer divisions, which are primarily blocking the path to Paris. It is therefore important to preserve their fighting power. Our own aim is to fight for time by means of offensive blows such as the one carried out by 2 SS Pz Corps.

2. It seems feasible and promising of success:

- (a) to inflict heavy blows on the enemy by keeping up the fighting power of the panzer divisions.
- (b) to refresh panzer divisions exhausted from such blows, make them fit for renewed commitment and thus avoid their being bled of all substance,

3. Proposal

Evacuation of Caen-North and the bridgehead:

Attention must be drawn to the fact that in the rear area of the Caen bridgehead the enemy so far has left only one bridge across the Orne intact. This probably for his own later use, as he controls it with his artillery and air arm.

Caen-South and the Orne to be defended. Further general course of the front for the time being approximately:

Avenay - Villers-Bocage - area of Caumont. 2 SS Pz Corps to be left on this front, early withdrawal of elements 21 Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div as Reserve and for recuperation.

Then renewed transition to offensive thrusts beyond the most effective range of naval artillery.

4. It is no longer possible

- (a) to achieve a breakthrough to the coast in the existing state of our forces and—once Cherbourg has fallen—to exploit it operationally.
- (b) to hold lines with panzer divisions without their dwindling or already depleted units—particularly the infantry elements—being consumed in a very short time.

This due to the naval artillery's effective range of up to 30 km, the enemy air activity and the air-observed artillery fire as in 1918. Even now it is possible to foretell the time by which 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div will have been destroyed.

- (c) to anticipate a change in the situation from badly equipped or mediocre infantry divisions which have indeed been allocated but cannot get here within the predictable future.

5. A clear cut choice must be made between the inevitable tactical patchwork of static defence, which leaves the initiative to the opponent, and a fluid operation drawing the initiative our way from time to time at least. It is the view of the Panzer Group that elastic conduct of fighting is the right way, and a stronger one than static defence of present lines. The experiences in the East speak for themselves in this respect.

Most important is that the decision be not made too late so that it may still be possible to exploit 2 SS Pz Corps' offensive blow.

Early concurrence is requested.

The Commander of the Panzer Group West

(signed) Baron von Geyr

Ops No. 116/44, Secret

O.B. West

Order of Battle

15 Jul and 15 Aug 44

981.045(D1)

Ref: Paras 155 and 251

(for actual Appendix

see e.g. Copy No. 2 of H.S. 4

Von Kluge's Letter to Hitler

18 Aug

693.023(23)

Ref: Para 266

did not exist. When I read this decisive order I immediately had the impression that here something was being demanded which would go down in history as a magnificent operation of the utmost daring, but which unfortunately was in practice impossible to carry out, and which would lay the blame conclusively on the responsible army commander.

I did my utmost to carry out your command. I also admit that it would have been better to have waited another day to begin the attack. But that would have altered nothing fundamentally. That is my unshakeable conviction, which I am taking to the grave with me, for the position had developed much too far, for anything to have been able to change it. There were already too strong forces on the southern flank of the Army Group, which, even if the Avranches gap had been closed, could have been quite easily supplied by air, and have received further support from the forces which had been poured into Brittany. Our own actual line of defence had already been so weakened that it was no longer to be expected that it could hold out for any length of time, especially as now the stream of new Anglo-American formations was thrown directly against it and no longer flowed through the Avranches gap to the South. When I agreed with the proposal of the Panzer Commander and of the 7th Army that they should strike quickly despite my better judgment, it was because we all knew exactly the holding power of the North Front of this army and no longer trusted it very much, even without taking into account the enemy's enveloping movement in the South. It was therefore a question of acting quickly, as the position in the air also demanded quick action. With regard to the position in the air, which almost completely ruled out a daylight battle, the prospects of the hoped-for success were likewise quite small. And the barometer remained high until today.

By reason of these facts I stick to my assertion that there were no chances of success; on the contrary, the attacks ordered were bound to make the all-round position of the Army Group decisively worse. And that is what happened.

The West army was in the end almost isolated from the personnel and material point of view. The desperate position in the East forced that. The rapid drop in numbers of tanks however, and of anti-tank weapons, and the insufficient supply of mortars to the so-called static divisions, produced the situation (made extremely more desperate by the losses in the so-called cauldron), which must be recognised to-day.

Owing to my strained relations with the new Chief

of General Staff,* who considers me his enemy, I could not approach him, and so there was no possibility of my receiving Panzer support for the West which was necessary. All that was decisive for the development of the overall position.

My Führer, I think I may claim for myself that I did everything within my power to be equal to the situation. In my covering letter to Field Marshal Rommel's memorandum which I sent you, I already pointed out the possible outcome of the situation. Both Rommel and I and probably all the Commanders here in the West, with experience of battle against Anglo-Americans with their preponderance of material, foresaw the present development. We were not listened to. Our appreciations were NOT dictated by pessimism, but from the sober knowledge of the facts. I do not know whether Field Marshal Model, who has been proved in every sphere, will still master the situation. From my heart I hope so. Should it not be so, however, and your new, greatly desired weapons, especially of the Air Force, not succeed, then, my Führer, make up your mind to end the war. The German people have borne such untold suffering that it is time to put an end to this frightfulness.

There must be ways to attain this end and above all prevent the Reich from falling under the Bolshevik heel. The actions of some of the officers taken prisoner in the East have always been an enigma to me. My Führer, I have always admired your greatness, your conduct in the gigantic struggle and your iron will to maintain yourself and National Socialism. If fate is stronger than your will and your genius so is Providence. You have fought an honourable and great fight. History will prove that for you. Shew yourself now also great enough to put an end to a hopeless struggle when necessary.

I depart from you, my Führer, as one who stood nearer to you than you perhaps realised in the consciousness that I did my duty to the utmost.

Heil my Führer,

(Signed) v. Kluge
Generalfeldmarschall

18 August, 1944

*Guderian

Hitler's Directive

of

20 Aug 44

981AGpB(D2)

Ref: Para 278

Chefsache
By hand of Officer only.

Armed Forces High Command
Operations Branch

Fuehrer Headquarters
20 Aug 44

8 Copies
Copy No. 7

Top Priority Teletype Message

To; 1. C.-in C. West;
2. C.-in C. Southwest;
3. for information: Naval High Command,
Naval Operations
Staff;
4. " " Air Force High Command,
Air Force Operations
Staff;
5. " " Chief of Army General
Staff for Operations
Branch

Re: Directive for C.-in C. West and C.-in C. Southwest for the further conduct of operations.

The enemy intends to capture Paris and to destroy all elements of Army Group "B" in the area between the lower Seine, the sea and the area of Argentan. Strong pressure on Paris and towards the North on the western shore of the lower Seine, possibly by employing the still uncommitted Parachute Army, must be reckoned with.

I order therefore:

1. Most important task of C.-in C. West is to maintain a bridgehead west of Paris and to prevent an enemy breakthrough between the Seine and Loire towards Dijon. The badly battered forces of the Fifth Panzer Army and of the Seventh Army will now have to fight their way

back behind the Touques-sector and to re-form their ranks, whereby the mobile formations are to be placed on the southern flank.

2. If the area forward of the Seine cannot be held, with the exception of ((the forces)) in the bridgehead west of Paris, all forces west and southwest of the line Seine - Yonne - Canal de Borgogne - Dijon - Dol - Swiss border, will be taken back behind this line and re-formed. This line will be defended.

3. For this purpose preparations are to be made for the taking back of the Seventh Army which, it is expected, will not be able to remain for long forward of the Seine with a river without bridges in the rear. All available ferrying facilities and suitable anti-aircraft artillery protection are to be concentrated there. Preparations are to be made for receiving these forces, particularly so at the narrow parts of the river bends swinging back to the East, which are particularly suitable for crossings.

Fifth Panzer Army - if necessary taking under its command the 26th and 27th SS Panzer Divisions, which are still en route to the front - will safeguard the Seventh Army's crossing of the Seine, and to this end will prevent an enemy advance towards the North in the Seine valley and a crossing of the Seine below Paris.

Condition of the forces and the supply situation permitting, Fifth Panzer Army, with the bulk of its forces operating in conjunction with elements of the First Army, will open the way to the bridgehead at Paris. This bridgehead, which is based on the numerous bridges across the Seine (which are to be specially protected by Anti-Aircraft Artillery) must be held at all cost.

A chord-position is to be prepared along the course of the Seine through Paris. If necessary the battle in and around Paris must be conducted regardless of the ((possible)) destruction of the city.

The First Army, which is to be strengthened as quickly as possible by the most forward elements of the forces returning from southwestern France - behind the Canal de Briare, astride Montargis - will cover the return movement of the forces from southwestern and southern France to the area behind the Canal de Borgogne, and will maintain contact with the southern wing of Fifth Panzer Army.

Nineteenth Army (with battleworthy elements in the lead) must establish a timely juncture of its forces with Army Group "B" in the area of Dijon. The withdrawal to the North will then be harmonized in accordance with the developments on the southern wing of Army Group "B".

Should, in spite of this, elements of Nineteenth Army fail to get back across the line Dijon - Swiss border, they must be turned off towards Northern Italy over the Mont Cenis and the Little St. Bernhard passes. Till the bulk of Nineteenth Army will have moved through to the North, C.-in C. Southwest will keep these passes open as far west as possible. At the same time care must be taken by means of thoroughgoing demolition of the roads leading from south to north through these mountains - in order to prevent an enemy advance through the Alps of the Provence and the Dauphine in the flank of the withdrawing forces of Nineteenth Army.

4. With regards to the making available of the personnel and materiel replacements in accordance with the demands of C.-in C. West, an order will follow. It is not possible to supply additional transport vehicles. Special powers in this respect for C.-in C. West vis-a-vis the other elements of the Armed Forces will be conferred separately.

signed: Adolf Hitler

Armed Forces High Command, Armed Forces
Operations Staff, Operations Branch, Nr.
772956/44, Secret, Chofsache.

For the correctness:

Freiherr v. Buttlar,
Maj Gen

Distribution

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