The beleagured Germans resumed their withdrawal during the night of July 29 and, shortly before midnight while a diversionary attack was launched from the south on Saint-Denis-le-Gast with flares and rockets, two columns descending from Roncey hit the village from the north. The move surprised the Americans who fell back, temporarily abandoning Saint-Denis. US troops rallied and retook the village at daybreak but sizeable German forces had already managed to escape to their own lines during the night. Others, less fortunate, ran into American units and were killed or captured. This PzKpfw IV, an Ausf H with the new type of idler wheel, most probably belonged to the battalion of PzKpfw IV tanks of the 2. SS-Panzer-Division which had broken through and was one of thoses lost in Saint-Denis that night.

This corner of Saint-Denis-le-Gast, the southern entrance of the village by the road to Gavray, has remained remarkably unchanged. Bernard Paich took this comparison for us in the summer of 2003.

Starting out on the afternoon of July 30, CCB of the 4th Armored Division moved rapidly through La Haye-Pesnel and Sartilly and had reached Avranches by evening. This picture, which was taken on the 31st, shows men of the 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Division, 'on their way to Avranches' behind the leading armoured combat commands. According to the marking visible on the front wing, this wrecked Opel Blitz had belonged to the artillery regiment of the 2. SS-Panzer-Division.

116. Panzer-Division, a unit which had recently been brought in from the Pas-de-Calais, from the forest to the River Sée. Further south, provisional units formed from various remnants and stragglers and operating under the staff of the 275. Infanterie-Division covered the gap south of the Sée and east of Avranches. Thus, with only scattered forces remaining in the gap, the route to open country in the south was practically clear for the Americans.

On August 1, the VIII Corps had consolidated its advance in the coastal zone of the Cotentin Peninsula and armoured columns were pushing beyond Pontaubault, south of Avranches. At noon that day, the US 12th Army Group under Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley became operational, Bradley having handed over command of the First Army to Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges. Simultaneously, the Third Army under Lieutenant General George S. Patton entered the battle on the right of the First Army. For the present, the 12th Army Group remained under the general direction and control of the 21st Army Group, and General Bernard L. Montgomery remained de facto commander of all the Allied ground forces.

Today's comparison when compared with the activity of yesterday is almost unreal. Though the wartime caption states that the picture shows troops in Brehal, we found that it was actually taken at Le Repas, a cross-roads 12 kilometres to the south-east. From the junction in the centre of the village we are looking along the D35 northwards with Avranches (behind the photographer) 20 kilometres away to the south.

Theobald finally pictured a Panzerknacker (tank hunter) team as the heavily-armed group crossed Ger. The leader (background) carried a Panzerschreck (anti-tank rocket launcher) and the man nearer the camera a Panzerfaust (one-shot anti-tank grenade launcher) and two rockets for the Panzerschreck. The soldier in between them is armed with a MP43 assault rifle.

the area between Sourdeval and Mortain, then along the south bank of the River Sée, made up from the 2. Panzer-Division reinforced by a panzer battalion each from 1. SS-Panzer-Division and 116. Panzer-Division.

On the right flank, the 116. Panzer-Division (deprived of most of its armour which had been attached to the 2. Panzer-Division) was to strike along the northern bank and then turn to the right to cover the flank of the attack.

This photograph is of particular interest for it indicates that these grenadiers left the D-157 to turn south-west on the D-38. From here, the front line was only a few kilometres further away to the west.