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189th Reserve Division (15 Aug - 14 Sep 1944)

By

Generalleutnant Richard von Schwerin

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von SCHWERIN
Major General
POW Camp 2226/3

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REPORT

according to "Rules for historical reports by German military personnel".

I have taken part as a Division Commander in the campaign in Southern France from 15 Aug 44 until the capture of Remiremont in the Vosges by the Americans in the middle of September 1944.

Preface:

Having no data and particularly no maps at my disposal, I cannot give a report in detail.

In my flat in the district of Stade I have notes on the precise time of the battles, the troops subordinated and about my CPs. If I could look into this data and into maps, I would be able to write a useful report.

Another big help would be the opportunity of a talk with my former adjutant, who is now living near Braunschweig.

For a report on the battles between Gray and the Vosges, at Geradmer, in which several troops with very different fighting power were subordinated to me, I would have to talk with my general staff officer of those days, Major Wolf, who at the end was employed in Southern Alsace.

Short report on my part in the battles.

As Commander of 189 Reserve Division I was stationed in the sector Sête - Pallavas in the Mediterranean. My CP was at Celleneuve near Montpellier. I was subordinated to 4 Luftwaffe Field Corps, whose C.G. was General Petersen of the air force.

In the last days before thw American landing, my Division replaced the 338 Infantry Division in the Rhône-Delta. At 0800 hours on 15 August, I arrived with my staff at the CP east of Arles, to replace the 338 Division staff (Com Maj Gen De l'Homme de Courbière). There, the order reached me not to carry out the replacement. Instead I was subordinated immediately as Staff Commander to AOK (Army Headquarters) of the 19 Army (C-i-C Gen Inf Wiese) and I was assigned to the CP of Corps H.Q. Kniess for orientation on the position. There I learned of the landing on the coast and about the envelopment of a Corps H.Q. at Draguignan north of Vidauban by paratroops. I was ordered by phone by the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Genlt. Botsch, to relieve the Corps H.Q. by an attack. For this purpose 2 Regt Staffs, 8 Bns, 1 Flak Regt and 1 Art Bn was brought up for me into the area west of Vidauban.

The Regt Staff of 15 Res Gren Regt (Com: Col. Rehbock), belonging to my Division, arrived first and was committed as reception staff for arriving troops on the road Brignolles - Vidauban in the area of Le Luc about 10 km west of Vidauban. Not far from it, my CP was set up and the assault Commander of my division under Lt Schaub was stationed there.

On the occasion of my reconnaissance tour to Vidauban, the Commander of the Flak Regt Col. Tiroler and the Commander of the second Regt Staff Col. Bruendel reported along with me.

From the Commander of the Flak Regt, I learned that the Regt was spread out to the area of Lyon and that the arrival of only small parts could be expected on that day. As a matter of fact, no troops of the Regt at all arrived on 15 August 1944.

After the inspection of the supply units of the Division of the sector (242 Infantry Division), Com Maj Gen Baesler, operating east of Vidauban as security, I informed Col. Bruendel of my intentions:

He was to attack to the East with the troops arriving first, to push as far as Le Muy and then, the situation permitting turn to the North and attack the enveloping troops, or else to screen to the East and to the South. Col. Rehbock was to attack from Vidauban to the North immediately after the arrival of the remaining troops. Col. Bruendel was ordered to get his troops ready east of Vidauban, so that they could attack at 0700 hours on 16 August.

After the landing at St. Raphael which occurred during this day, I was ordered by phone by the army, to carry out the attack in such a way as to restore the main line of resistance at St. Raphael. But because I considered this order as unpracticable with the weak forces at my disposal - I even did not know yet their strength and fighting power - I decided not to change my original plans.

Although only half of each of the two Bns of 242 Infantry Division and 338 Infantry Division had arrived in the evening, I gave Col. Bruendel the order to attack at 0700 hours of 16 August 1944, whatever the strength of his troops was. I subordinated the assault company of my Division to him, which of course had only 7 groups without heavy arms.

I gave this order despite the very weak troops, because I believed that a success could be gained only if the attack was under way before landing troops from the South could interfere. I was convinced that the attack was bound to fail in the case of interference by landing troops from the South.

At 0700 hours of 16 August the attack began with 1½ Bns and the assault company without support from artillery and flak. MY CP was, from 0600 hours on, at the castle west of Vidauban. I had the radio company and the telephone company as signal troops with me. There was only radio contact with the troops, by means of French 100 kw sets. The telephone company was used only for communication within the CP.

The attack reached Les Ares at 1100 hours. At that moment, new parachute landings in the rear of the attacking troops occurred. In addition to it, tanks attacked from the South towards Vidauban and to the West of it. Any further attack, therefore, was impossible.

My staff of the Division and the staff of the Flak Regt had to yield to the Northwest under the pressure of the tank attack. The attack of the other Regt Group (Col. Rehbock) never did take place, because no further troops had arrived. Why, I don't know. Later the destruction of the Rhône bridgeheads by air raids were given as reasons.

In the following two days, I withdrew with the very weak forces of the 242 Infantry Division, then unknown to me, along the road Vidauban - Aix. The fighting was particularly hard in the area between Brignolles and Tourves. Of great disadvantage was the complete lack of air support and even of air reconnaissance.

Continuous American dive-bombing interfered very much with the movements on the roads. The losses in men were, I think, small but the losses in vehicles and equipment very heavy.

On the evening of 18 August, I was ordered by the army to leave my staff behind for the purpose of completing the staff of 242 Infantry Division and to go at once to Montpellier, where I would be subordinated again to the Corps H.Q. of the 4 Luftwaffe Field Corps for command of a task force. My first officer Lt/Col. von Lindequist was that day transferred to 242 Infantry Division to replace the Gen Staff officer of that division, who was badly wounded by a dive bomber.

On the afternoon of 19 August, I arrived at Montpellier via Arles and the same evening I took over a sector in the Rhône-Delta in the Mediterranean, where the preparations for the departure to the North were going on.

The withdrawal under leadership of the 4 Luftwaffe Field Corps was carried out in three taks forces west of the Rhône, of which the one under my command - "Task force von Schwerin" - was confined to the road in the Rhône-valley. West of it marched "Task force Richter" under the command of Major General Richter, Commander of 711 Infantry Division (?) 716 Infantry Division if Wilhelm Richter.

My troops consisted of 1 Inf Regt Staff, 2 Inf Bns, 3 Russian volunteer Bns, 1 Artillery Bn and the personnel of all artillery Flaks, left behind or destroyed in the sector on the Mediterranean because of immobility. (I have data about it at home.) I got the composition of the task force only in writing and on the basis of that I gave my first march orders. A personal influence on the troops was made very difficult by low-level attacks which rendered movements in day-light impossible. Marches were carried out at night. The independent incorporation of smaller formations and of single motor vehicles coming from the Pyrenees and the Garonne-valley every night caused considerable delays in the march. Additional difficulties for the command arose from the complete lack of means of communication.

If the marches nevertheless resulted, in a disengagement almost without losses, it was due to nothing else but to the good discipline of the troops. In the first days of the retreat, the troops had hardly any fighting power except the two Inf Bns, marching as rear units. There was no fighting at the beginning of the march.

After four or five days, the march was delayed by the French resistance movement. The two task forces to the West could not retreat at the speed ordered because of the obstacles and barriers set up in the mountains by the French resistance movement. So they too had to use the road in the Rhône-valley and had to march there.

South of Lyon, I was transferred with the my task force to the Eastern bank of the Rhône and I was ordered to hold, as rear formation of the 19 Army, the bridgehead southeast of Lyon for three days and then to evacuate the city, bit by bit, within three days. For this purpose, the combat commander and the troops in Lyon were subordinated to me. These troops consisted for the greater part of schools of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) and they, hardly trained in infantry battle, were of little fighting power and their commanders were without combat experience. The evacuation went smoothly if not without considerable losses, despite the attacks from the Southeast. (I have data on the battle for Lyon in my house.)

Immediately after the evacuation, the rear of the task force was caught by being pursued, attacked and overtaken from the Southwest, being cut off thereby. This was the first attack of the Americans on the Western bank of the Rhône. The loss of the two rear Bns was made possible by the air force school not obeying my order to secure the disengagement from Lyon at the place where the attack was carried out later on (I could give the name of the place if I had a map at hand.) Instead, the air force school had marched to the North.

On my further retreat to Gerardmer via Macon, Châlon sur Saône, Beaune, Gray, Vesoul, Luxieux, Remiremont contact with the enemy was never lost. The intensity and stubborness of the fighting was increasing, the more so because I had to slow down the withdrawal considerably between Beune and Luxieux, to secure the Southern flank of the troops of 1 Army withdrawing to the North of us.

From Dijon I was no longer subordinated to the 4 Luftwaffe Field Corps but to another Corps H.Q., whose number (64) LXIV Res Corps and whose Commanding General I cannot remember without my notes. When I left (in the middle of

September) the Commanding General was Major General Lasch (previously Sachs).

The last battle under my command was the defense of Remiremont by the 628 Motor Bn under Major Leye and the 36 Res Rifle Bn under Capt. Zander. After a vigorous battle of three days against parts of the 36th US Division, I ordered the evacuation of the city. (On this battle, too, I have data at home.)

The same day I resigned from my command of the task force because of ill-health, and went home.

Schwerin