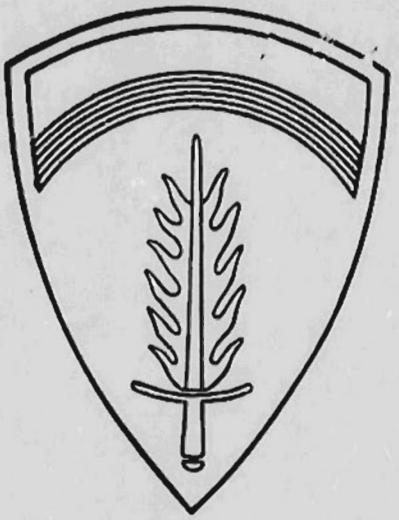
edited by Mad Dog

MS # A-889



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US CAMPAIGN ON THE WEST FRONT

15 AUG – 14 SEP 1944

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HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE
FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES BRANCH

MS # A-889

US CAMPAIGN ON THE WEST FRONT

(15 Aug-14 Sep 1944)

By

Ernst Dehner, General der Infanterie

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Hellmuth Reinhardt
Brigadier General (Generalmajor), Retired

KOENIGSTEIN, 4 January 1950

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AMERICAN CAMPAIGN ON THE WESTERN FRONT

SOUTHERN FRANCE, 15 AUGUST - 14 SEPTEMBER 1944

Signed: HELLMUTH REINHARDT

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US CAMPAIGN ON THE WEST FRONT

(15 Aug-14 Sep 1944)

All the records, which would have aided me in submitting a specific report, together with my stored luggage at Prien (Upper Bavaria), which also included my diary, had been looted by Polish workers after my capture on 3 May 44. For this reason I cannot guarantee the dates given or the exact developments of individual, ever changing events.

At the beginning of the "US Campaign Southern France", I was just about to take over my new position as Commander of the Army region Southern France. This took place, as far as I remember, between 9 and 12 August 44.

My superior duty station was that of the Military Commander of occupied France. At that time nc communications with him existed. (Telephone communication was constantly interrupted; radio messages were received in incomprehensible form, courier communication was considerably disturbed by enemy interference.) I cannot remember that I ever received any orders from that command.

Subordinated to me, were:

a. The Chief Liaison Staffs Lyon, Clermont Ferrand, Toulouse and Avignon.

b. Replacement and Training Division 157, located in the vicinity of Grenoble.

The Chief Liaison Staffs had their subordinated Liaison Staffs, whose individual Security Battalions were assigned to the protection of railroads, roads and other military objectives. I am no longer in a position to give specifications of the individual battalions, and other particulars.

Of the Chief Liaison Staffs Toulouse and Avignon, only those elements were subordinated to me, which were not within the Army's operational area.

With the beginning of the "US Campaign in Southern France", there was, as far as I remember, no longer any contact with the Chief Liaison Staffs Toulouse and Avignon. At that time they received their instructions directly from Army Group "G".

Combat efficiency of the subordinated troops:

a. Chief Liaison Staffs with subordinated Liaison Staffs and Security Battalions: Staffs not suitable for combat. Combat efficiency among the troops very low; not organized nor trained for combat. No heavy weapons, no means of communication. Partially equipped with out-dated rifles. Guard duty troops only. Officers and men from higher age groups.

b. Replacement and Training Division: A non-mobile Recruit-Training Division, consisting of Infantry Mountain Jaeger; a Mountain Artillery Bn and an Engineer Battalion.

Limited combat efficiency. Armament hardly adequate for training. No Signal Battalion. Officers and NCO's consisted mostly of the sick and disabled.

At the outset of the "US Campaign Southern France", my staff, together with the Chief Liaison Staffs at Lyon and Avignon, was placed under the command of Army Group "G", where it received the name "Generalkommando Dehner", (Corps Headquarters Dehner). I do not remember the exact date, but it may have been the 18 or 19 Aug.

As far as I recall, I received the following order from Army Group "G":

"Keep the rear open with your remaining forces from Chief Liaison Staff Lyon and Avignon for the 19 Army fighting in the south-especially the route of retreat, located east of the Rhone-and cover the eastern flank with Training and Replacement Division 157 until arrival of the 19 Army in the area of Lyon."

Shortly thereafter, communication with the Replacement and Training Division 157 ceased. I forgot whether this Division ever received my order to cover the eastern flank. Radio messages no longer got through, or were received in a completely garbled form.

Later, I found out that Replacement and Training Division 157 had been pushed into the mountains to the east. For a short time it was subordinated to the 19 Army, and then to Army Group South (Italy).

The eastern Rhone Valley road and the clearance roads from Lyon were secured by the inadequate forces at the disposal of the Chief Liaison Staffs at Lyon and Avignon.

These holding forces were very often the object of enemy action, leading to clashes and exchanges of fire. I am unable to give specific details from memory alone.

19 Army units began to arrive toward the end of the month, and with their arrival my mission came to an end. On or about 23 Aug, the C in C of Army Group "G" personally arrived at Lyon and ordered the Staff of "Generalkommando Dehner" to proceed to Dijon by 31 Aug.

Arriving at Dijon (1 Sep), the "Generalkommando Dehner" was immediately subordinated to the 19 Army and was given the following mission:

"To pass all retreating major forces through the line of Besancon-Pontarlier-Swiss frontier.

In addition, the subordination of all the forces already committed in this line."

These consisted of:

a. Several auxiliary, mobile engineer units armed only with light weapons. They were already engaged in working on the construction of obstacles in the line Besancon-Pontarlier-Swiss frontier. Communication with these forces was non-existent.

b. Units of Flak Regiment "Tyroller", which-as far as I remember-had several 8,8 cm Flak-AA guns emplaced at the western edge of Besancon and in the area to the northwest of the town.

c. The 159 Reserve Division.

After an accident to its original commander, whose name I cannot recall, a certain General Axel Schmidt had been appointed to this post. He had been the commander of the artillery school Autun. However, he too failed to arrive. He was captured. Therefore, Maj Gen Kohl was finally appointed.

The 159 Res Div arrived without its artillery from another assignment.

I am unable now exactly to recall the individual front sector assigned to me.

It is presumed that on account of the repeated changes in the command of the 159 Res Div, there was a certain confusion of leadership. In any case, neither Maj Gen Kohl nor I knew that orders had been given to the 159 Res Div to attack Besancon from the north. It is believed that the Army may have given this order directly to the division before the division had been placed under the command of Maj Gen Kohl.

As far as I remember, our own forces were located in early Sept as in enclosed sketch.

Note on the sketch:

a. One Security Battalion-which, as far as I know, had been withdrawn from a different assignment-was ordered to block the narrows southeast of Morre. The battalion received several additional light Flak guns for this purpose.

b. 11 Pz Div units were on guard duties at Avanne. It was here that American troops forced a crossing of the Doubs, (date ?), and pressed forward to the North and northeast. This caused the same 11 Pz Div units to fall back to the southwestern edge of Besancon, where they were very soon relieved. As far as I know they were there committed 20-30 kms southeast of Besancon.

c. As far as I can remember, naval troops were here employed (armed only with small arms and one light gun).

d. One 8,8 cm Flak only, and some infantry were used.

e. Commitment of units of the 159 Res Div along with several light and heavy Flak guns.

The CP for "Generalkommando Dehner" was as of 1 or 2 Sep until 5 Sep located at Besancon, and the CP of the 159 Res Div was on the northern edge at Besancon.

At about that time, enemy forces crossed the Doubs on both sides of Besancon and threatened to encircle the city. On account of this, the CP of the "Generalkommando" was on 6 Sep transferred to Ecole.

Communication with units located east of Besancon and on the Swiss frontier now no longer existed. According to a garbled radio message which was received, enemy tanks had succeeded in breaking through at Pontalier, and also to the North.

The CP of "Generalkommando Dehner" had to be moved again several hours later from Ecole to Devecey, because of the effects of enemy action from the Fort of Chene du Sage and Chalegende.

At Besancon, units of the 159 Reserve Division had been surrounded by the enemy, while the remainder of the division withdrew on 7 or 8 Sep to behind the Ognon and blocked with what other forces remained the crossings at Bussiere, Voray and Buthiers (see sketch). I cannot remember which troop units comprised the junction of the left and right wings (on the right, presumably the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps, and on the right, probably the 11 Pz Division). It is presumed that there were large gaps on both wings.

"Generalkommando Dehner" suffered heavy losses, especially in heavy flak (AA guns), which, for reasons of immobility, could not be moved to the rear in time.

The staff of the "Generalkommando" moved to Soran~~s~~-les-Breurey, and that of the 159 Reserve Division went to Boult.

On 9 Sep 44 the enemy succeeded in making a breakthrough on the left neighboring sector, (probably at Cirey on the Ognon).

This quickly endangered the staff of the 'Generalkommando" at Sorans-les-Breurey, and also blocked the road to Rioz. The staff of the "Generalkommando" succeeded only with difficulty in freeing itself from encirclement, and in fighting its way to the division staff of the 159 Reserve Division. Almost simultaneously, the enemy crossed the unimportant obstacle of the Ognon, forcing the front of the 159 Res Div further back.

After this withdrawal-as far as I can recall-the staff of the "Generalkommando Dehner" proceeded to Mailley-et-Chazelot, and the staff of the 159 Res Div went to Le Magnoray. The weak forces of this division were ordered to hold the line Hyet-Quenoche.

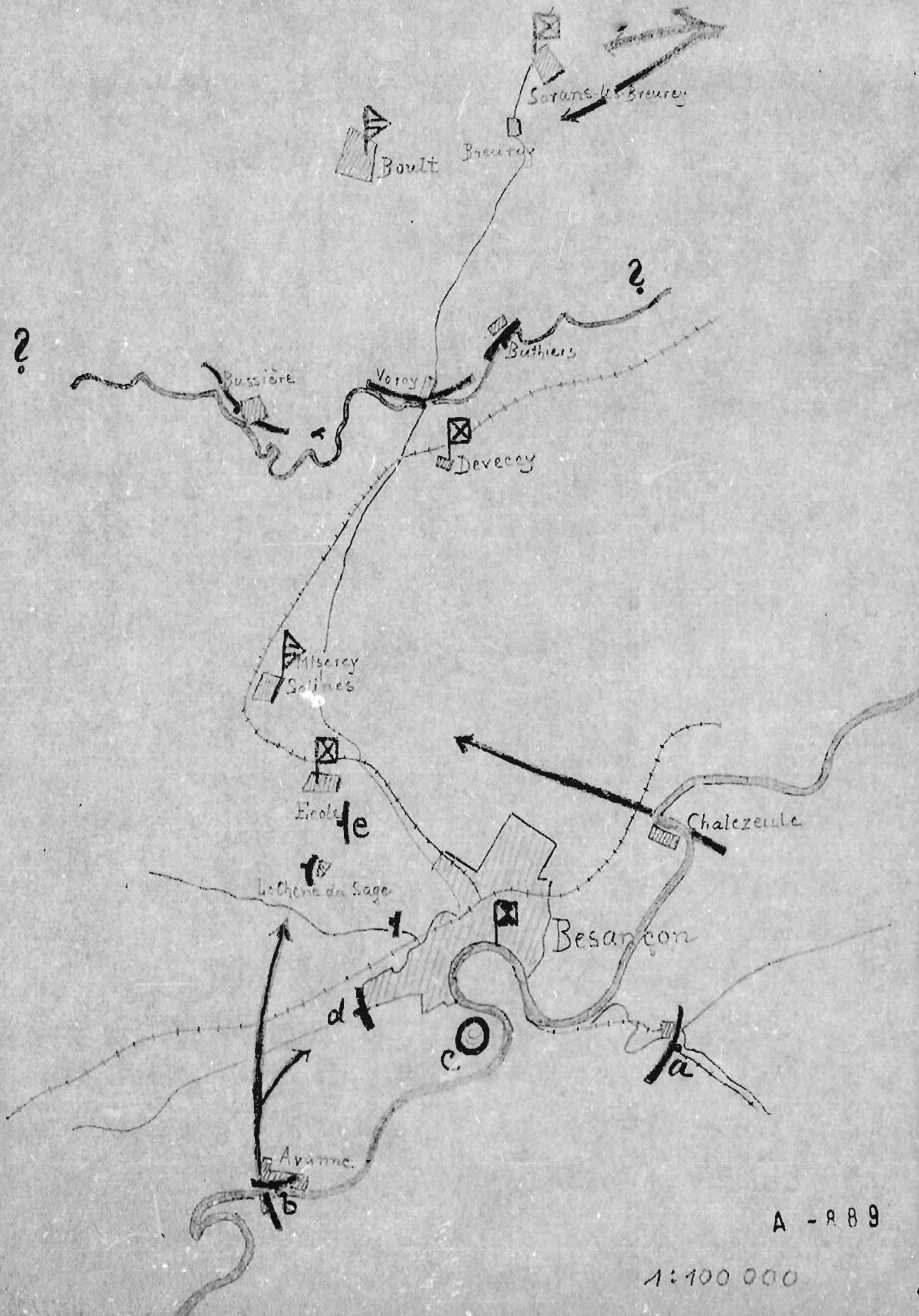
On account of heavy losses, the troops of "Generalkommando Dehner" (approximately only 2-3 battalions) were subordinated to the right neighbor corps. (IV Luftwaffe Field Corps). The staff of the "Generalkommando Dehner" was releaved and placed at the disposal of the 19 Army, northeast of Belfort.

Here it was given the task, (approximately covering 14 Sep 44-mid-November 44), of preparing to block the Swiss frontier from Delle, (inclusive), to Basel, (exclusive).

Staff Headquarters was at Altkirch.

3 Zoll (customs) battalions, (equipped only with small arms), were subordinated.

sign. DEHNER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