

GERMAN REACTION TO THE INVASION
OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

QU: 1. What was your strength by divisions, and their disposition along the south of France prior to our invasion of 15 August 1944?

ANS: 1. Between Perpignan and the Rhone: 709th Inf Div; 198th Inf Div, 189th Reserve Div.
Rhone estuary: 338th Inf Div.
Between the Rhone and the Italian Boarder. 244th Inf Div, 242d Inf Div, 148th Reserve Div.
Available as Reserves: 157th Res. Div; 11th Panzer Div.

Evaluation of the Divisions:

709th and 198th Inf Divs. Being made up to strength.

Suffered heavily in the Normandy campaign.

189th Reserve Div. Weak

338th Inf Div. Static division very hard to move.

244th & 242d Inf Divs. Completely fit for service.

However the three last-mentioned divisions had abandoned their motorized Artillery and part of their anti-tank weapons to the Normandy front.

148th Reserve Div. Weak. Later switched to the Maritime Alps front.

157th Reserve Div. Reserve Mountain Division; later switched to the Italian boarder (See answer # 8)

11th Panzer Division. Fit for full service, moved up to the Toulouse region.

QU: 2. To what extent was your front weakened by sending troops up to Normandy?

ANS: 2. Up to 15 August the following were relinquished for the Normandy front: 271st, 272d, 277th Inf Divs, 9th Panzer Div. Also motorized artillery, Antitank weapons and Antiaircraft artillery.

QU: 3. How complete were your fortifications along the southern coast? If they were incomplete had you set a definite date for completing these fortifications? What other improvements in the fortifications might have been made if you had had the time?

ANS: 3. The fortifying of the South Coast was severely restricted in favor of the Channel and Atlantic fronts. No heavy installations were erected except for the existing French works. Typical defenses were water obstacles, concrete walls on the beaches, and mining of the deeper water. The defenses themselves were only field fortifications or a little better. No special date for completion of a defense system was therefore in question.

Had time and the means for further installations been available it would have been, in my opinion, most essential to fortify well in the interior of the defense zone. This applies especially to the entrances to the Cevennes Mts., the effluence of the Rhone around Avignon, for the valley of the Durance and for the Maritime Alps.

QU: 4. Did you expect the landing on the southern coast to come at the point where it in fact occurred? From what other point did you expect it? Did the landing take the form you had anticipated, e.g. were you surprised by airborne landings?

ANS: 4. The landing was in fact expected where it came. Besides this there were rumors among the population that on 15 August (Napoleon's Day) the Allies would land and, as he had done, drive through via Grenoble. We further expected a landing in the Narbonne area. When the landing occurred it also took the form anticipated. The landing of airborne troops could not be a surprise.

QU: 5. What general plan did you have to meet the invasion? How much of this plan was put into effect?

ANS: 5. It was our intention under the original distribution of forces, corresponding to the American situation map, to counter attack with the two Panzer Divisions together as soon as the enemy landed. The diversion of strong forces to Normandy (See Answer 2) forced us to limit our counter-measures.

QU: 6. After our troops landed, what was the chain of events which turned the scales against your side?

ANS: 6. On 17 August the OKW order was received to evacuate the Atlantic coast between the Loire and Hendaye and the withdrawal from the Mediterranean front. These operations had to be synchronized in the general direction of Dijon. The Central Plateau and the Cevenness had to be bypassed (See ANS: 7).

The entrance to the Rhone valley near Avignon had to be kept open until the troops between Perpignan and Arles had linked up on their left wing and withdrawn up the road on the West bank of the Rhone valley.

In view of the enemy air superiority and the clear summer weather, night marches, which were limited by the time of year to a few hours, were to be made. The defense of Toulon and later of Marseilles was entrusted to the 242d with elements of the 338th and 244th Inf Divs. The danger that the enemy pursuing us would catch up with us in the Durance Valley through Grenoble grew. The destruction of the Rhone bridges between Arles and Valence by enemy bombers held up for a long time the transfer of the infantry moving over from the Narbonne front, as well as the 11th Panzer Division from the positions at Nimes back into the region East of the Rhone. A two-day high-water in the Rhone valley, caused by dounpours in the Alps, made the task of fighting back through the valley more difficult.

On reaching the Rhone bend at Lyon it was ordered to secure the safety of the troops which were being routed from the regions of Toulouse, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Poitiers, south of the Loire and through Bourges and Nevers, in the direction of Dijon. We were well aware of the danger of being caught up with along the Swiss frontier by the enemy, and being forced away from the Belfort gap. We succeeded in surmounting this danger by continuing to hold the southern front by shielding its North flank in the interior on the Plateau of Langres against the American armored units collected in the Troyes region, and by fluid commitment of troops arriving from the SW front in hard struggles on the Doubs. The 11th Panzer Division played a decisive part in this. Through continuous hard fighting the front was drawn back by 1 October into the Meurthe sector on both sides of Epinal and around Belfort. On the North it linked up with our own forces around Luneville and Nancy.

QU. 7. To what extent were you handicaped by the activities of the French Resistance movement in that area? What did they do to interfere with your military operations? How much did they hinder your withdrawal across France?

ANS: 7. Since the landing in Normandy the French Resistance movement had entangled us increasingly in combats. These were especially frequent in Gascony, the Central Plateau, the Cevennes and in the area between the Rhone and the Alps. As the retreat of our troops accelerated they were more and more often attacked and the destruction of bridges, streets, railroads and canals became more and more serious. In these areas our troop movements became more and more difficult. The final result of this situation was that the 19th Army had to fight its way back through the narrow Rhone valley and the troops from the Bay of Biscay had to retreat

on a road between the Central Plateau and the Loire. Protracted marches, supply problems and long delays were the result.

QU: 8. What orders did you receive for withdrawing across France? What was your plan?

ANS: 8. According to the instructions given me by the OKW I was to withdraw the 1st and 19th Army troops under my command onto the Plateau of Langres and link up with the East wing of Army Group "B". The 148th and 157th Reserve Divisions were subordinated to Commander in Chief Southwest. The operational movements as described in Answers 5-7 were systematically carried through by me in accordance with the position from time to time.

QU: 9. What was your plan of defense when you reached the German border?

ANS: 9. On reaching the Plateau of Langres the effort to make contact with the East wing of Army Group "B" had already become out-of-date. It had been withdrawn in the Meurthe positions. (See Answer 6).

It was my intention in the further course of the fighting not to retreat, unless compelled to do so, onto the SW edge of the Vosges and later onto the "crest" positions. Both positions had meanwhile been reinforced continuously and had strong defensive possibilities. The danger lay on the two flanks, in the Belfort Gap and on the Saverne rise, possession of which is decisive for entrance into the Upper Rhine lowland.