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SOUTHERN FRANCE

(15 Aug 1944-15 Sep 1944)

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HEADQUARTERS  
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## I. HISTORY OF PRECEDING EVENTS

1. The extent of my command ..... the remaining portions of the 716 Division withdrawn from Normandy, along with the weak permanent units in the coastal sector, the latter subordinated to the Division. The 716th Division itself was tactically and for the purposes of its own economy subordinated to the Luftwaffe Field Corps commanded by General Petersen, and thus it belonged to the formation of the 19 Army.

2. The sector of the Division was that portion of the coastline some 10 km north of Perpignan, to the Spanish frontier; its headquarters in the field was situated 8 km south of that place in Thuringia. I cannot recall the lay-out of the units, or the different sectors occupied by them, being completely without maps or data to work on.

Our neighbor on the left was the 198 Division, under Brigadier General Richter.

3. Our mission was to hold the coastal sectors against any attack made by the enemy first of all, and secondly, to utilize the time while no attack was made for the freshening up of the Division and the filling up of the gaps in its ranks.

4. My division had been defeated and badly beaten up in Normandy. The individual batteries came in one by one between the 28 June and the

15 August. The strength of these—as near as I can say now—was about 100 men each, for the most part without heavy weapons except for heavy machine guns and single antitank weapons, for the Infantry. So far as the artillery was concerned, only the men themselves returned ..... no guns or other fighting vehicles. The portions returning consisted for the most part of the remains of the Regimental Staff and the staffs of the 1st and 11th Battalion of the Artillery Regiment, along with portions of the combat trains; the Sapper and Engineering Battalion had only about 150 men left, without any gear at all. There was also an armored infantry battalion, the remains of the antiaircraft company and two armored infantry companies. About half of the signals and communications battalion was left, with still sufficient communications gear left, but as good as no field telephone gear at all.

a. The Divisional Staff and the rearward services. They had lost about 10 % of their effectives. No Regimental Commander for the Grenadier Regiment; two battalions of Dondere's troops, one of them released from hospital prematurely. The artillery losses were on about the same scale as also those of NCO's.

b. Evaluation: Practically useless until re-formed, as they had no weapons or ammunition. Their spirit was good.

From the 20 July to the 19 August, at what time the retreat started .....the following replacements had been added:

e. Infantry: 4,000 good replacements ..... men with fighting experience who had been on leave from the Eastern Front, officers and NCO's among them. With these, we managed to make up two regiments, of two battalions and one regiment with one battalion of German troops and— for the time being, in a temporary way—also the Russia Battalion.

d. Artillery: Some 1,200 replacements with guns and ammunition trucks, hardly any signal trucks, no horses or harness, like the other units of the Division. In all, we were short of about 60 to 80 % of strength in men and equipment on 15 August, and were obliged to buy horses and harness locally for the march back.

5. The coastal sector was not to be held against an enemy attack, considering the state of the fortifications and the state of the detachments, they could not even have stood up to a weak attack. As to the strength of the enemy—if he attacked—it was bound to be in superior strength, he would not have needed to be very strong for that. It did not appear that he had any intention of attacking here, as it would not have been operationally to the point.

## II. THE BATTLES FOUGHT

1. At about 2200 hrs on 17 August we received the order to start the retreat northward and began the movement on the 19. I no longer recall the exact wording of the order. Our destination in the first stage was Dijon and east thereof. The time of starting the march each day and our daily destination were decided each day.

2. It was usual during the retreat for the Divisional Commander to make his decisions on his own initiative, because traffic jams occurring everywhere among the flow of men moving rearward, rather than any influence exerted by the enemy, made it necessary to alter times and goals frequently.

3. The first stage of the Division's march was west of the valley of the Rhone but I had to take the step of altering the order and marching into the Rhone Valley, for the enemy had blown up the road and the bridges west of the valley and there was no chance of making a detour.

Rhineland: (15 Sept - 25 Dec, 1944)

After leaving the Heights of Aijon, sometime about the 15 Sept, the Division was subordinated to the 13 Artillery Regiment, under General Rasch of the Infantry, later under General Thum.

4. We marched mostly by night, but also at times during the day. Certain losses we did have, but they were not very great, generally only vehicles and horses, of which the troops of the rearward services had too many in any case; so had the higher staffs.

5. The valley of the Rhone—Chalons sur Seine—Mosel east of Epinal. Difficulties in signal communications—during the fighting we only had radio, special missions staff officers, and motor-cycle messengers. From south of the Mosel onward, after depending on the telegraph, we had our own telephone network, and made great use of the regular postal lines. The communications situation improved a bit from the middle of September, everything else was very poor.

6. We were short of supplies, and the situation in this regard got worse as time went on; they were mostly brought up at night.

7. Completely lacking.

8. Likewise.

### III. ESTIMATE.

1. The influence of the enemy air attacks on the marching troops was not too serious; we were only delayed on the march by having to take cover from time to time and repair damage done. The effect on troops attacking the enemy was a delaying one, depending to a great extent on the quality of the troops themselves.

The attacks of enemy infantry supported by tanks, against very weak resistance, became more and more cautious. The tanks risked nothing without the aid of infantry, and the infantry nothing without the tanks. At the start of the Normandy Invasion both troops and tanks--(British Divisions)--had been a bit rash or at least lacked sufficient fighting experience.

Artillery fire as a rule good and superior in force. Decuple issues of ammunition like our own artillery, with corresponding effect. Not devastating in any instance.

Weather: Mostly clear, but much fog, rain, and later snow in October. Terrain. High or medium hills, covered with woods. Only our own troops with no good positions or points of observation.

Crises were more the rule than the exception in all the battles which were fought, as the sectors occupied were very extensive and our own forces meager.

Starting from the Mosel between Spinal and Remiremont, the last crisis which occurred was in the fighting west and south of Schlettstadt, as long as the division was still in existence. Practically every situation developed into a crisis, as we had no real infantrymen left, but only substitutes taken from supply and combat trains and from Luftwaffe battalions, naval units, Army replacements, and so on.

The Division was ordered to be withdrawn between 10 and 14 Dec and united with the remainder of the 708 Volksgrenadier Division, as it now consisted of only remnants too. The Divisional Commander, after acting as Deputy Commander of the 10 V.G.D. for a short period, was transferred to the Fuehrer Reserve on 25 Dec 44.