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MS # B-781

General der Infanterie

8 March 1948

Friedrich WIESE

Formerly OB of the 19th Army

The 19th Army in the Belfort Gap, in the Vosges, and in

Alsace from the middle of September

until 18 December 1944

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from the middle of September until 18 December 1944.

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Remark: This document is the continuation of document MS # B-787

"The 19th Army in Southern France and in front of the Belfort Gap. -
Opinions and remarks of the commanding officer." -

With the help of a very few documents I have tried to reconstruct the events in large sketches. The opinions, intentions and remarks are according to the situation at that time. Whenever I had any documents at my disposal, this is especially mentioned with the individual events.

1. The situation of the 19th Army at the middle of September 1944.

Enclosure 1

The sketch - enclosure 1 - shows in blue lines the approximate course of the defense line of the 19th Army at the middle of September 1944.

a) The mission of the Army at that time was:

aa) The defense of the Belfort Gap and

bb) the keeping open of the area still in our possession:

Mirecourt-Neufchateau-Langres-Lure for an offensive to
the North to be made with new forces.

b) Troops assigned from the right:

LXVI Army Corps (Lucht) in Bains-les-Bains with the 16th Reserve Division at the northern front and the assembled groups from the parts of the First Army at the western front which had been received near Dijon. This Army Corps had been directly led by the Army Group until that time. In its present subordinate position the Army had become solely responsible for keeping open (task bb). The occupation of the line of
ense was only effected in the manner of strong points
connected. The combat value of the troops was to be
as very low.

LXIV Army Corps at Remiremont. It was in contact to the south of Langres and apart from the 716th Infantry Division at the left flank west of Vesoul it was composed of collected combat troops, too. Otherwise the same has to be said as of the corps adjoining to the right.

IV Luftwaffe Field Corps in Le Thillot. 338th Infantry Division highly battle weary - north of Vesoul, 189th Reserve Division - highly battle weary - and 198th Infantry Division - weakened but still fit for fighting - to the northeast of Vesoul.

LXXXV Army Corps in Belfort. 159th Infantry Division in front of Lure - weakened but able to fight - and division combat group Degener west of Hericourt, improvisedly put together during the fighting west of Belfort, scantily equipped and of small combat value.

11th Panzer Division at Montbeliard, assigned from the Doubs River to the Swiss border, good and strong for combat. No reserves were available.

c) Review of the situation.

The Army had been very fortunate to be able scantily to block the Belfort Gap through the utmost readiness for action of its battle weary troops. However, there it was still fighting hard, for which all its forces were needed. It would not have been able to counter a large-scale attack. However, it was confident that it would be able to fulfill its task here for some time if the local attacks went on, especially as it had the 11th Panzer Division at Belfort, which had to come to its aid as fire department whenever help was needed. It was different concerning the task of keeping open the area of Mirecourt-Neufchateau-Langres-Lure. It already proved to be impossible to hold the line in

the south in the face of continued attacks of superior enemy forces, while it was impossible to reinforce the line from forces at the Belfort Gap. The taking over of the LXVI Army Corps in the north happened exactly at that time when there, too, the attack of strong enemy forces against the northern front of the Corps (16th Reserve Division) started. An armored brigade which had been made up from reserve troops in the zone of the interior and which was intended for the offensive, came up via Gerardmer. The Army did not know what other forces were to come up for the offensive. Higher headquarters, however, strictly and unequivocally adhered to the fulfillment of the task of keeping the area open. The Army's representations, either to desist from the plan and to withdraw to a short line in the Western Vosges or immediately to make available sufficient new forces, remained unheard. Neither did the OB of the Army Group succeed in finding any hearing for his presumably similar idea. Thus nothing was left but to hope for good luck.

2) Abandoning the area of Mirecourt-Neufchateau-Langres-Lure.

The heavy attacks made by the American XV Army Corps against the front of the 16th Reserve Division Charmes-Mirecourt-Neufchateau - at the middle of September 1944 led to a frontal encirclement of Neufchateau, while on the whole the front itself was being held in alternating fighting; then one of the enemy's armored divisions had succeeded in pushing through south of Neufchateau in the rear of the 16th Reserve Division to Dompierre-Ville south of Mirecourt. Thus the 16th Reserve Division was cut off. The armored brigade which in the meantime had come up to Bains-les-Bains received the mission to relieve the 16th Reserve Division. It lacked inner coherence and combat experience. It was not in a position to fulfill its mission. Anyhow, it succeeded in binding the enemy's armored division and in putting a stop to its further advance. Through

combat as well as through fighter bomber attacks the armored brigade lost almost all its tanks. Then the 16th Reserve Division still succeeded to extract itself with the bulk of its troops from the encirclement and to install itself for a new defense at the Moselle line Charmes-Epinal.

In the south the enemy continued his attacks simultaneously from Gray, Vesoul and Lure. In hard individual combat in difficult terrain and without any close co-operation the troops were pressed back to the line Moselle - Le Thillot - Plancher - Champagney.

Thus the higher leadership's plan for the offensive was deprived of its basis. How and with what forces it had been planned, never came known to me.

The sketch - enclosure 1 - shows in green lines the approximate front of the Army at that time.

3) Evaluation of the situation after the events of No. 2.

Now the Army had to organize quickly its units and to effect a somewhat orderly defense on the shortened line. That was quickly achieved, even though somewhat scantily, and the Army was conscious of the fact that it was now concerned with the mere defense of Alsace-Lorraine, which was not to be lost. Though in spite of constant requests no reinforcements were forthcoming, the Army had to effect a compensation, which, however, could always only be a scanty one, by using all means of leadership, by improvising, by hazardingly moving forces, by utilizing the troops to the utmost and by employing the last man and material. As long as the Army was still drawn up far in the western approaches to the ridge of the Vosges, it still had the possibility of a mobile defense. This quite rightly appeared to it as a factor of strength. As long as the enemy did not turn up in massed attacks on a broad basis, it felt able time and again to close the front, even though terrain was being lost. Thus the Army dreaded to be pressed back to the Vosges main position, for a strong defense in the

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Vosges main position would have needed strong forces, which were not available, and it would have deprived the Army of its freedom of movement.

This interpretation of the Army's was the basis for its actions in the following period.

The Vosges-Belfort main position was being consolidated under the leadership of the Strasbourg Gauleiter. For the approximate course see sketch - enclosure 1 - (green interrupted double lines).

4) Events and opinions until approximately the middle of November 1944.

About 23 September 1944 a change was effected in the leadership of the Army Group, which from then on was called Group of Armies C. General der Panzertruppen BALCK replaced Generaloberst BLASKOWITZ. The chief of the general staff was changed, too.

At this time the situation of the First Army had become most critically through strong and deep enemy penetrations, especially in the area Nancy-Luneville. Here, too, forces were lacking everywhere. The 19th Army could only scantily encounter the threat to its open right flank by assigning hastily brought up security forces to Remberwillers and Baccarat. It was a heavy blow to the Army when it had simultaneously, to set in march the 11th Panzer Division from the Belfort area towards the First Army. Instead of receiving urgently needed reinforcements, it was thus deprived of its strongest and best battle unit. That meant a great risk for the holding of the Belfort Gap. The 11th Panzer Division, still immediately subordinate to the Army, did not only have to defend its sector, but beyond that it became the last reserve and the backbone for the whole of the Belfort Gap. If at first on the representations of the Army a combat group of 12 to 15 tanks IV and an artillery battalion were left behind, then this was merely an emergency measure, the Army

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was only able to fill up the front sector of the 11th Panzer Division by an improvised emergency unit which had been put together from their own forces, the division combat Group von OPPEN.

Besides, until the end of September 1944 it had been possible to defend the Belfort Gap against numerous and partly strong enemy attacks which had their aim in reaching Belfort. A rather closely knit defense had been achieved. Special commendation has to be made of the valiant and successful fighting of the 159th Reserve Division and especailly of the 11th Panzer Division. From September 1944 onwards there was a relatively quiet time in the Belfort Gap. The French forces which were stationed opposite, remained rather passive.

However, the very vivid and locally strong offense activities of the American and French divisions on the other front sectors of the Army did not abate. On the whole it shifted from one sector to another. In the mentioned course of time the main centers became the area of Le Thillot - La Bresse - le Tholy - Geradmer, Bruyeres and the area of Baccarat - west of St.Die. According to reports made by agents and to captured documents it was the intention of the enemy to thrust through to the Alsace via the Vosges passes. As long as the enemy did not turn up for a continuous general attack on a broad front - and contrary to expectations this did not happen - the Army was still able through the most hazardous displacements of forces, which became a rule, to fend off the enemy attacks in bitter fighting, in defense, withdrawing, and counter-attacks, though with heavy losses of terrain. The offense tactics of the enemy consisted in the beginning mainly in attacking in the course of the mountain roads under strong assistance of tanks and artillery. As long as these tactics were pursued, it was possible to create main points of defense and it was comparatively easy to fend off the attacks. When later on the enemy altered these tactics which had

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been of little success to him and when he made his attacks diagonally through the mountain area, then the lack of forces became alarmingly clear to the defense. Larger and larger losses of terrain resulted from it.

The following changes in subordinate troops during this time have to be noted:

Losses: The combat group of the 11th Panzer Division from the Belfort Gap in October 1944.

Gains: Panzer Brigade 106 (Feldherrnhalle) approximately mid-October until beginning November - assignment at la Bresse.

21st Panzer Division - assignment on the right flank at both sides of Baccarat.

269th Infantry Division on 27 October - assignment south of la Bresse, where it arrived just in time to prevent a breakthrough. 1st assault gun battalion for exchangeable assignment at the focal points in the Army's sector.

Some fortress construction battalions (machine gun, engineers, infantry) only meant for assignment at the Vosges-Belfort main front.

The approximate line of defense of the Army before the breakthrough at Belfort - about the middle of November 1944 - is to be seen from the sketch - enclosure 1 - (twice interrupted pencil lines). Enclosure 2 shows the structure.

5) The enemy's breakthrough the Belfort Gap and the fighting resulting from it.

a) The situation at the beginning of the large-scale attack.

Towards the middle of November 1944 the situation in the Belfort area became increasingly alarming. According to the enemy's situation the Army expected the strong attack of the French forces. When I was informed

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of Churchill's inspection and cheering-up visit with the French forces in the Southern Vosges and in Besancon, then I had no more doubts that the large-scale attack in the Belfort Gap would be effected in the immediate future. The repeated representations with the group of armies for expediting of making available at least one armored division in the Belfort Gap did not have any results. Thus the Army was in the Belfort Gap completely without tanks and assault guns, with combat weakened divisions and with little artillery only. No assistance by air would be forthcoming. According to the combat situation at the other front sectors it was not able to make available any reinforcement forces. The only reserve was the army service school with approximately 1,000 recruits at Neubreisach and Kolmar, half of which, however, in the form of a battalion, could only be assigned. The guns for the rear Belfort-Vosges main position were still coming up. Only a few guns had arrived and had been built in. The position itself (Giromagny - west of Belfort-Delle) had already become a through trench with a simple wire obstacle. However, most of the time the trenches were full of water, dugouts, strong points and armament were lacking. Only a few security troops (fortress battalions) were kept in readiness in the line.

Directly before the start of the enemy attack the corps headquarters of the LXXXV Army Corps had been extracted from Belfort by higher orders and had been sent for assignment outside the group of armies. Thus the Army had been bereaved of the well functioning leadership with its well functioning signal unit and its important transportation columns. The missing columns opened a gap which could not be filled in, as the two division combat teams of the corps did not have any troops of their own (columns, etc.). A new corps headquarters had hastily been assembled, mostly from military administration headquarters of Southern France. It was being designated as LXIII Army Corps. Only the chief of the general staff of the old corps headquarters

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remained, so that at least one person thoroughly acquainted with the matter was available. The new commanding general (SCHACK) had really taken over a very difficult heritage.

This was the situation at the Belfort Gap at the time of the start of the expected large-scale attack. The Army very worriedly looked towards the future developments. It did not possess anything to give any effective assistance.

b) The attack and breakthrough.

Enclosure 3 - see sketch - enclosure 3

The attack began on 14 November 1944 with the 189th Infantry Division. Point of main effort on the borderline of the division combat group Degener and the 338th Infantry Division. The success of the first day consisted in local penetration in which it was possible to block off. From these places of penetration the attack was renewed time and again, with the result of increasing gains of terrain. It was left to the discretion of the Army to withdraw to the Vosges-Belfort main position to await the further attack there. In agreement with the corps headquarters of the LXIII Army Corps the Army was unable to take this decision, as it was not possible to defend this position on account of the weather which had meanwhile become wintry and on account of the already mentioned conditions. The fierce enemy attacks gradually stretched towards the north to the Ballon d'Alsace. Finally in hard fighting they lead to a pressing back of our own front to the Vosges-Belfort main position. Specially hard fighting ensued for the terrain in front of Belfort. Fighting was incredibly hard and many losses were sustained by our own infantry units against the enemy's heavy armored attacks, as a movable antitank defense was lacking. Main points of efforts were Belfort and the area to the northwest of Delle. On trucks the

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Army sent the corps headquarters the battalion of the army service school and one detail of the army engineer school to Belfort; the battalion was meant for assignment at Delle. When during the critical night before the breakthrough the reinforcements arrived in Belfort, the situation there had become so critical - numerous enemy tanks had entered the town - so that the corps headquarters assigned the battalion here though it was meant for Delle. The battalion disabled a considerable number of tanks through Panzerfaust. However, it was then lacking at Delle. Here the 1st French Armored Division broke through at the early dawn of 10 November 1944 when our own troops were still coming up into the main position. This division, which was followed by other divisions reached a completely unoccupied area along the road Delle-Seppois-Hueningen and - I believe during the following day - they reached the Rhine, while the bulk of the forces gathered in the area south of Muelhouse. I believe it was the following day (20 November) when the 1st French Armored Division and the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division were able to occupy Muehlhouse.

Thus the Army met with a catastrophic situation. It had an open left flank of a good 50 km, where for the time being the 1st French Armored Division, the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division and parts of the 9th Colonial Division and of the 5th French Armored Division were situated and had full freedom of movement. The LXIII Army Corps was completely bound near Belfort. The experiment, to attack and thus to push through to Delle, was unsuccessful. The Army reckoned with the fact that the French forces would continue their non-stop advance to the north from Muehlhouse, in order to unhinge the 19th Army. However, they did not utilize this chance.

c) Development of the situation.

The LXIII Army Corps was able to hold the enemy's attacks around Belfort, which had been lost, approximately in the line of Gironagny - to the east of Belfort - Rhine-Rhone Canal up to Dammerkirch and it was possible

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scantily to hold this lines. The Army succeeded in putting up a scanty defense front, approximately in the line of Dammerkirch - Altkirch, in a circle just to the north of Muehlhouse- Rhine near Kembs. For this purpose anything available in men and material had been combined into combat groups and had been thrown into the open flank under the approved and tested leadership which had been made up from the troops and from the staffs up to the Army High Command. Among those which were assigned were the reserve troop units in the Alsace, a Russian SS-Division which was in the process of being set up, trains and artillery as well as armor-piercing weapons of the front units. In hard and changing fighting, especially to the north of Muehlhouse on both banks of the Ill River and in the Hart Forest it was possible to ward off all attacks made by the French.

d) Our own attack on Dammerkirch - Swiss border.

(See sketch - enclosure 3 - green lines)

Then the Army planned to attack from the area of Dammerkirch towards the south to the Swiss border. The aim was to cut off the French forces in the area of Muehlhouse from their supply bases and to encircle them. By rail, trucks and on foot the following forces were hastily brought up: 198th Infantry Division from the front of the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps, one heavy motorized anti-tank battalion, and artillery.

The concentration of the troops for action was being effected in an incredibly short time. The attack was a full success. Unfortunately the supply forces were lacking to enlarge the wedge which had been won and which reached the Swiss border at Rechasy. Thus, after a struggle which lasted some days, the enemy succeeded in pressing back the wedge across the road Delle - Seppois - Waldighofen and thus to free his supply lines.

e) The enemy attack in the Hart Forest and our own attack around Muehlhouse.

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(See sketch - enclosure 3 - green double lines)

Then the enemy started a heavy armored attack from Muehlhouse through the Hart Forest. The result of the attack was a deep penetration and the serious endangering of the Rhine bridge at Neuenburg. Our counter-attack in which we employed the 189th Infantry Division, which had been extracted, was a full success. The enemy suffered heavy losses in men and material. The main line of battle could be pushed forward in the Hart Forest up to the heights of Rixheim to the east of Muehlhouse.

As a result of this success the group of armies demanded an attack on Muehlhouse. The intention of the Army was rejected, which had been to combine the attack from the area south of Dammerkirch via Altkirch with a simultaneous strengthening of the 198th Infantry Division in the wedge in the direction of the Swiss border, and thus to open the possibility for a renewed push towards the Swiss border. The attack was started on 23 November 1944 from the Hart Forest east of Muehlhouse towards the southwest with Panzer Brigade 106, which had been brought up, the 189th Infantry Division and one heavy motorized anti-tank battalion. It was stopped through the fall of Strasbourg. The Army did not estimate the chances for success as very good ones. Panzer Brigade 106 was quickly set in march to the First Army. As a result of the fall of Strasbourg further attacks of our own at the southern front of the Army were out of the question. Here the Army had to limit itself to mere defense.

6) The fall of Strasbourg and its consequences of the 19th Army.

a) The situation on the Army's right flank before the fall of Strasbourg.

Continuous heavy enemy attacks had been made on the right flank of the Army in the area of Domevre-Baccarat-St.Die since the middle of

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November 1944. According to the Army's interpretation this aimed at winning the Vosges passes for the attack on the Alsace. Only by employing of all remaining forces and by overloading the troops was it possible to intercept the attacks. At this time the 21st Panzer Division was being taken out, which had given good support to the right flank of the Army, and it was sent for assignment with the First Army. It was being relieved by the 708th Volks Grenadier Division, a division which had been newly set up in the Protectorate and which had been brought up by rail to the area around Schirmeck. The still inexperienced 708th Volks Grenadier Division was already being involved in hard fighting when it relieved the 21st Panzer Division. It incurred heavy losses and amongst others it lost during the first days of fighting its assault gun battalion west of Bodenweiler. During this battle the Army was put in charge of the sector of the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division of the First Army up to the Rhine Marne Canal. This division, which was lacking essential parts, had accomplished most commendable achievements in hard defense fighting. It was evidently bleeding to death. No reserves were available. Here it was clearly visible that the enemy intended to push through to Saarbourg-Zabern. From reasons concerned with command technics the transfer of the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division under the 19th Army had been recinded some days later. Then the enemy's southern breakthrough towards Saarbourg and Zabern was made on the sector of this division. A big gap had been torn between the First and 19th Army into which the enemy's troops flooded. The result of this was first the turning backwards of the right Army flank to the high Vosges and later on the pushing back of the front up to Geradmer.

b) Consequences of the fall of Strasbourg for the 19th Army.

On the right flank of the Army the events quickly followed one another and led to a non-stop pushing back of the LXIV Army Corps through

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the Vosges in a general southeastern direction. Contacts could be kept only at great pains. The occupation of Strasbourg on 23 November 1944 opened a gap of 50 km in the right flank of the Army, where no troops were to be found. Thus the Army was in a similar position as at the time at Muehlhouse. It estimated that the enemy with strong forces would at once proceed from the newly won area Strasbourg-Vosges towards the south to the Alsace, in order to cut off the Army and to encircle it in a joint attack from the area of Muehlhouse to the north. However, the advance from the Strasbourg-Vosges area to the south was only made hesitatingly and without any connections. Nothing moved at Muehlhouse. In a manner similar to the one it had applied at Muehlhouse the Army succeeded in blocking off the Strasbourg line and to put up a line of defense to the north approximately in the line of Erstein-Molsheim and in loose connection with the LXIV Army Corps. For this purpose the 198th Infantry Division had been made to give up the wedge of Dammerskirch towards the Swiss border and had been brought up by rail and trucks into the area of Schlettstadt and had been assigned between the Rhine and the Ill River in the most endangered sector. It was the backbone of the new front and in connection with the combat groups and a Nashorn anti-tank company it had repulsed the enemy's attacks in a most commendable manner.

7) In the bridgehead Upper Rhine.

a) The situation of the Army on 6 December 1944 is shown by the sketch - enclosure 4, which has been made according to an original situation map. At that time the Army had been compressed into the bridgehead Upper Rhine, which was to be held according to orders. As a consequence of the uninterrupted battles the divisions had become very weak and battle weary as concerns both personnel and material. The Army's requests for forces were dismissed by pointing out to a relief of which the Army would feel the benefit in the near future. - That was

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all the information the Army got concerning the Ardennes offensive, which was being prepared. - The Army in the bridgehead Upper Rhine was especially worried about the contact with the rear area, as the Rhine constituted a severe obstacle concerning supplies. In the sector of the Army there were only the two railway and highway bridges across the Rhine at Breisach and at Neuenburg. The latter was under the enemy's artillery fire from the Muehlhouse front and both were the aim of continued enemy air attacks. Railroad traffic continued nevertheless until the middle of December 1944, even though it was only a scanty one and increasingly interrupted. Besides there were a number of ferries which kept up an emergency traffic across the Rhine. No other Army installations than hospitals were on the other side of the Rhine up to the middle of December 1944. The Rhine was being kept under strict control. Starting with the end of November the supply of munitions and arms failed more and more to a disturbing extent. And it was especially munition which the Army needed especially for fighting in the bridgehead. The population showed an absolutely loyal attitude.

On 6 December 1944 the corps headquarters of the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps - which had in the meantime become the XC Army Corps (90) - had already been extricated from the Army area assignment in the north. The front sector of the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps was added to the LXIV and LXIII Army Corps.

Enclosure 5.

b) The enemy's situation on 9 December 1944 becomes evident from enclosure 5, which is a copy of the original.

c) The Army's subordination to the group of armies Upper Rhine.

On 9 December 1944 the Army was subordinated to the newly set up group of armies Upper Rhine, whose commander was the Reichsfuehrer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, with headquarters in Triberg. Apart from the Army two newly formed SS

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corps belonged to the group of armies Upper Rhine, which occupied the line of the Rhine with security and reserve troops.

It was the device of the Reichsfuehrer-SS, to change over to open combat activity.

d) Attack operations in the area Schlettstadt - Kolmar.

Situation: At that time the main points of effort in the Army sector were the area Schlettstadt - Kolmar, Hohneck and the area Thann - Sennheim. The enemy had infiltrated the area Schlettstadt - Kolmar and had proceeded to the Ill River south of Schlettstadt - Ostheim - Kaysersberg (to the north of Kolmar). Heavy fighting had been started here, severely endangering Kolmar. In the area Thann - Sennheim a hard struggle had resulted in checking the heavy attacks.

Plan of attack: The plan is evident from the sketch - enclosure 4 - green lines. It was the aim of the attack to take Schlettstadt, to eliminate the danger to Kolmar and first of all to push the main line of battle forward to the line of Schlettstadt - Val de Ville - Thannenkirch - Rappoldsweller - Kaysersberg. The LXIV Army Corps was entrusted with the execution of this mission.

The following forces were made available:

In the area A near Schlettstadt:

Grenadier Regiments 305 and 736, and battalion 726 of the 10th Infantry Division. Engineer battalions 235 and 708. Parts of Panzer Brigade 103 and 106, one company of Nashorn anti-tank unit 103, artillery assistance from 28 first and seventh heavy guns.

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In the area B near Sigolsheim:

Regiment Braun of the reserve Army.

Combat group of Panzer Brigade 106.

Grenadier Regiment 326 of the 189th Reserve Division.

In the area C near Kayzersberg:

Regiment Reimer of the reserve Army.

Regiment Ayser of the reserve Army.

Artillery support for B and C:

58 first, 24 heavy guns and 6 heavy mortars.

In reserve were:

Reichsfuehrer-SS escort battalion in Komar.

Motorized battalion Ellwangen of the reserve Army to the east of Kolmar.

Evaluation of the attack:

The picture of the enemy situation made it evident that enemy forces were being drawn away from the Rhine - Kolmar front. In the area of attack opposite us were the 36th American Division which had known hard combat and many losses. The Army was of the opinion that the undertaking of an attack had very good chances of success. It was worried on account of artillery ammunition which had not yet come up and on account of the means of signal communications.

The course of the attack:

After the forces had been supplied, the attack began on 12 December 1944. Until noon the results were satisfactory. Then, however, hard enemy resistance brought the attack to a standstill. The attack on Schlettstadt had to be abandoned. After re-grouping and after part of the Schlettstadt forces

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had been drawn out, the attack was continued near Kolmar on 13 December 1944. In bitter fighting far into the night to 14 December the Sigolsheimer heights was retaken completely and through fighting a main line of battle was won which was a favorable one and which eliminated the direct danger to Kolmar. The further attack was ceased according to orders.

The reasons for the fact that the attack did not have the hoped for success are to be seen in:

- (1) the sufficient supply of artillery ammunition and that the means of signal communications (especially radio) were not sufficient,
- (2) that the units of the reserve Army which were brought up were not well functioning and were mostly unaccustomed to battle,
- (3) that the enemy's defense was especially tenacious and firm.

There were no special events up to 18 December 1944. That was the day when I relinquished the leadership of the Army.

(signed) Wiese

Enclosure 1

Sketch of the 19th Army.

1 : 1 000 000

Nancy		Saarbourg	Zabern
	Luneville		Strasbourg
Neufchateau		Baccarat	
	Hambervillers		
Mirecourt		St.Die	
			Schlettstadt
Chaumont	Epinal		
		Geradmer	Colmar
Bains-les-Bains			
Langres			Gebweiler
		Le Thillot	
			Giromagny Muehlhouse
		Lure	Kembs
			Lammerkirch
	Vesoul	Belfort	Altkirch
		Dole	
			Basel

Remarks:

approx. course of the defense line at the middle of September
 " " " " " about the end " " 1944
 Vosges-Belfort-main line under construction
 approx. course of the defense line at the beginning of November
 1944.

Enclosure 2Diagram of the structure of the 19th Army
at the beginning of November 1944.

21st approx. at the middle of November relieved by 708	}	LXIV
Volks Grenadier division		
15th reserve division		
716th infantry division	}	IVth Luft- waffe Army Corps
198th infantry division		
armored brigade 106		
269th infantry division		
139th reserve division	}	LXXXV
159th reserve division		
division combat group Oppen		
338th(united with combat group Degener		

Enclosure 3Sketch of the 19th Army.

November 1944 Belfort - Muehlhouse.

1 : 2 000 000

Ballon d' Alsace

Neuenburg

Harth woods

Girromagny

Muehlhouse

b
Kong's

Belfort

Dammerkirch

Altkirch

Hueningen

v. Oppen

Rhine - Rhine Canal

Delle

Rechesy

Basle

Montbeliard

Switzerland

approx. main line of battle before the beginning of the break through
 " " " " " after the " " " "

operation : attack Dammerkirch - Swiss border
 " " Harth woods.

Enclosure 4

Situation of the 19th Army

on 6 Dec 1944.

1 : 2 000 000

Aim of attack on 12 December
Preparations area and direction of attack.

Erstein

Friesenheim

Schlettstadt

Rappertswiller

Ostheim

Kaysersberg

Sigolsheim

Ingersheim

Kolmar

Vidensolen

Breisach

Muenster

Neubreisach

Hohneck

Gebweiler

Hirtzfelden

Hoefner

Thann

Sennheim

Harth woods Neuenburg

Muehlhouse

Enclosure 5

The situation of the enemy at 1600 hours on 9 Dec 1944.

1 : 500 000

Saarbourg

Zabern

Molsheim

Strasbourg

St.Die

Markirch

Schlettstadt

Le Bonhomme

Kolmar

Geradmer

Hœbneck

Muenster

Kruth

Gebweiler

Thann

Belfort

Altkirch

Montbeliar

Basle

MS # B-781

Group Rhineland

Commentary to the Report

Neustadt, 19 March 1948

The 19th Army in the Belfort Gap, in the Vosges and in Alsace from the middle of September 1944 until 18 December 1944.

General der Infanterie a.D.

Friedrich Wiese.

The former commanding officer of the 19th Army describes in rough outlines the battle on the southern flank of the German Western Front in connection with the withdrawal of his unit through the Rhone Valley. The enemy's breakthrough at Muehlhouse and Strasbourg caused the isolation of the 19th Army in the "bridge-head Upper Rhine". The measures he has taken to prevent the enemy from crossing the Vosges passes, and after the enemy had broken through, the covering of the resulting deep, open flank, are being thoroughly described. Concerning further details the report of the then Army Chief of Staff, Generalleutnant Botsch, should be seen.

As seen from the German side the enemy's actions are being commented on at intervals.

(signed) Werner Drews

Neustadt, 6 April 1948

Group West

To Historical Division

General der Infanterie Friedrich WIESE describes in the enclosed report the enemy's breakthrough the Belfort Gap and the resulting battle of the 19th Army in the bridgehead Upper Rhine.

1.) (Concerning pages 2/4)

The mission, to hold the front sector which was echeloned far in front of Mirecourt - Neufchateau - Langres - Lure, meant a considerable load to the 19th Army which had been very much weakened in its fighting withdrawal from the Mediterranean. The first intention had been to make a counter-attack from this area towards the southeast, towards the Swiss border in the direction of Pontarlier with the newly set up Fifth Panzer Army. This intentions was abandoned when the enemy by further advancing towards Metz brought the First Army into a critical situation. However, neither the plans made then were executed, neither the attack between the Meuse and Mosel to the northwest, nor the one west of the Mosel to the north. The reasons for this were to be found in the late concentration of the Fifth Panzer Army and in the development of our own unfavorable situation in the northern part of the front sector which had occurred in the meantime. Instead of the attack which had been planned with an operational aim, only a push to the east of the Mosel was being made with a limited aim, which was to close the gap which had been torn between the First and 19th Army. It has to be assumed that this final result would also have been effected if the front sector would have been given up in time and without the assignment of the Fifth Panzer Army, which would also have given the 19th Army its necessary reserves for its later fighting for the Belfort Gap.

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2.) (Concerning page 6)

General Wiese is of the opinion, that it would have been easier for the Army to achieve its object concerning the mission it had been given in mobile defense in the western foreground of the Vosges ridge than in the immobile defense of the Vosges main line, which was approximately 35 km behind it on the northern half, and approximately 15 km behind it on the southern half, and that also only as long as the enemy did not turn up with massed attacks. Here the question arises whether or not an earlier mounting by the 19th Army of the Vosges main position, which had not yet been finished but which offered a more favorable terrain, would not have resulted in a better support. For it is a fact that not only the foreground position but also the main position was broken into after the enemy had come up for his "massed attack"; for its permanent defense all those forces were lacking which had been used up in the foreground battles, which had not been able to get any protection from any natural obstacles, which had been used in improvisations, in "hazardous displacements", in continuous movements and in many failures.

AOK 19 still refused to order a withdrawal to the Vosges main position after the enemy's large-scale attack had started on 14 November 1944 and had led to continuously more widening penetrations. (Remark: General Wiese's description contrasts here with the report (MS # B-263) of his Chief of Staff, Generalleutnant Botsch, who reports, that the left army flank started the withdrawal on 15 November with the sanction of the groups of armies.) At that moment it was already too late to expect anything yet from the main position which had been neglected up to then. General Botsch reports that the "French attack which was made in hot pursuit of our own withdrawal, led to the breakthrough at Delle (through the main position) on 18 November 1944." Similar events have also occurred on the other fronts, where the more mobile enemy reached the new line of support often before our

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own troops came up. The highest German leadership did not make any deductions from these experience.

It was of special disadvantage for the left flank of the Army that exactly at this time the corps headquarters of the LXXXV Army Corps were taken out, which was the command authority there, and that the improvised corps headquarters of the LXIII Army Corps was in no respect master of the situation.

3.) After the enemy's breakthrough to Muehlhouse on 18 November 1944, and to Strasbourg on 23 November the 19th Army was in one of its most critical situations. It was almost a miracle that neither the French First Army from the Muehlhouse area started northwards, nor the American Seventh Army from the Strasbourg area started southwards. The French forces which had broken through into the Muehlhouse area up to 20 November were according to estimates made at that time estimated at $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 armored divisions and one infantry division; they remained completely passive. The reason for this might have been that they were worried concerning their supply lines which were limited to a narrow corridor; however, for the time being nothing was done in order to widen this basis to the north. On the right flank of the Army, too, stood the Seventh American Army with two armored divisions and it was ready for a push to the south. If it would have started, without encountering any resistance worth mentioning, it would have been able to join hands with the French group at Muehlhouse on 25 November. For the time being here, too, no serious attack was being started. Thus the 19th Army was able to protect both its flanks and to form the bridge-head Alsace, which in connection with the Ardennes offensive was yet to play a role in the deliberations of the highest German leadership.

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General Wiese's report gives a general survey of the course of the fighting and offers considerations and opinions of the AOK which was very much oppressed by the enemy and also hindered in its freedom of action by the highest authorities.

The report is a welcome supplement to the already existing report by the Chief of the General Staff, Generalleutnant Botsch, on the fighting in the foreground of the Vosges, in the Vosges and in the bridgehead Alsace. Part reports are also available concerning this period of time made by the subordinate corps headquarters of the LXIII and LXIV Army Corps, and by the IV Luftwaffen Field Corps.

(signed) Brandenberger

Enclosures:

One report, 19 pages

Five sketches

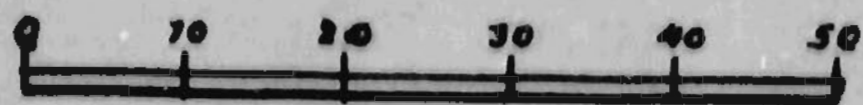
One commentary by Oberstleutnant Drews

One indication of authorities used

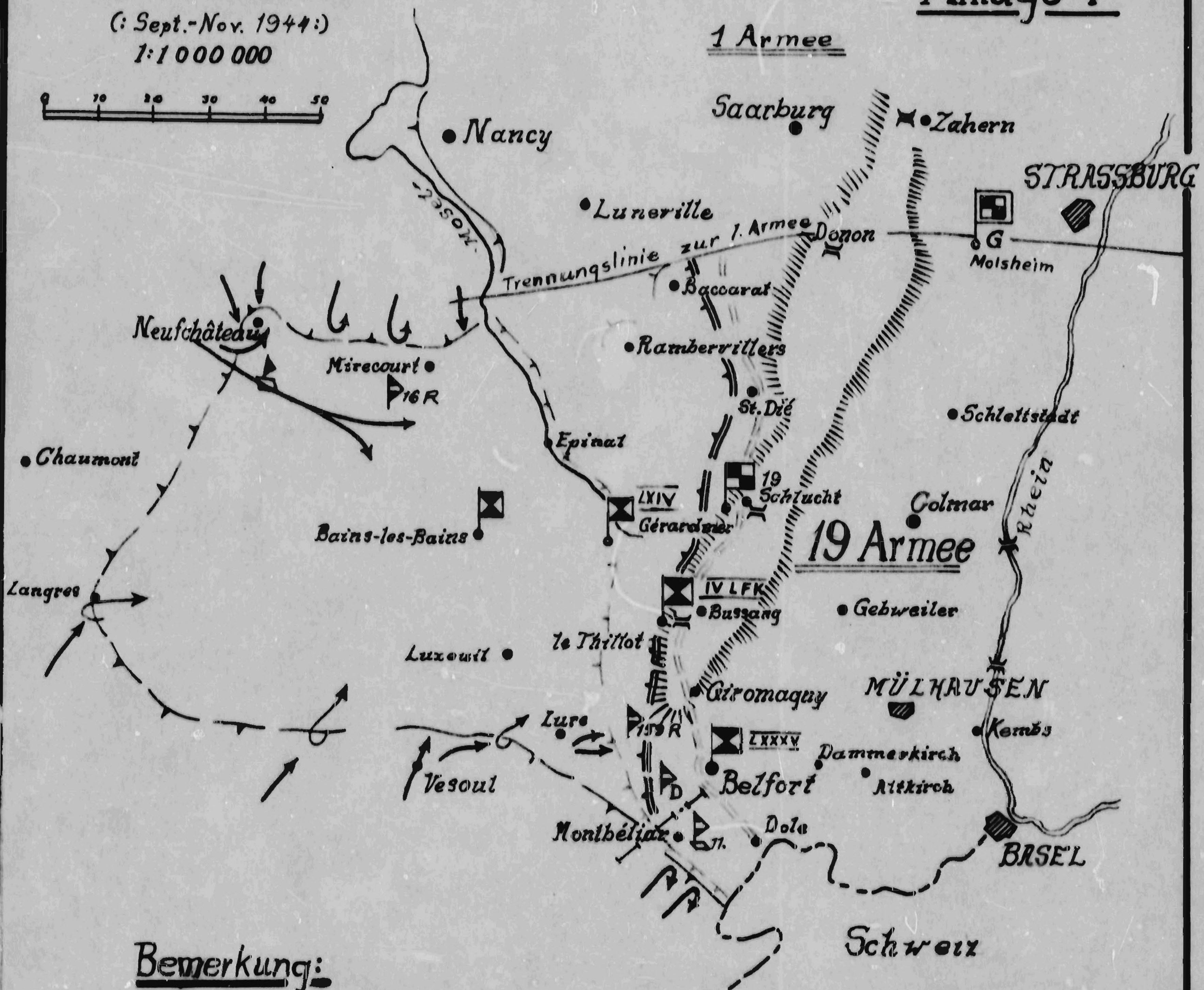
Skizze 19. Armee

(: Sept.-Nov. 1944:)

1:1 0 00 000



Anlage 1



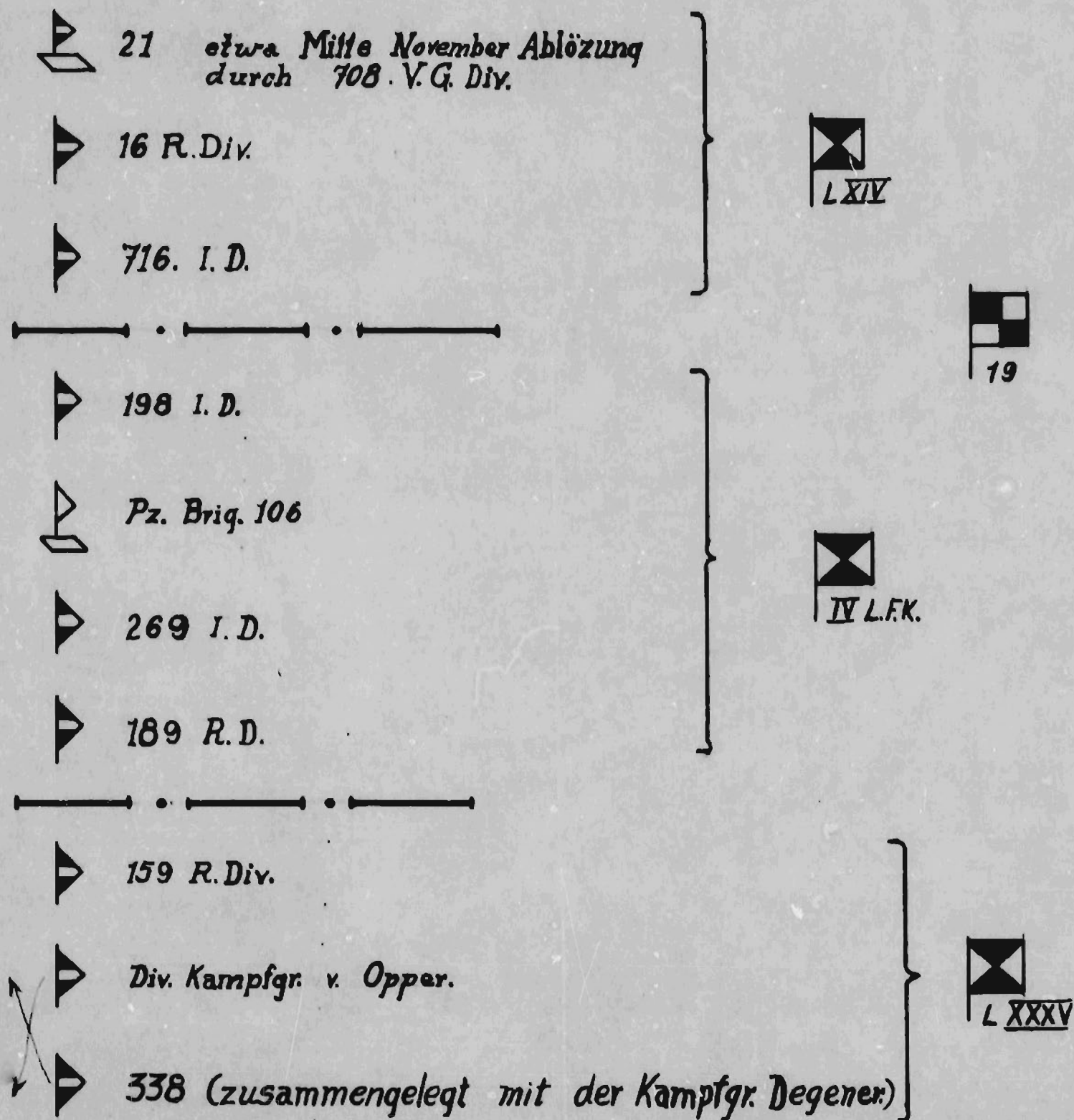
Bemerkung:

- = ungefähre Verlauf der Verteidigungslinie Mitte September 1944
 = " " " " gegen Ende " "
 = im Bau befindliche Vogesen-Belfort Hauptstellung
 = ungefähre Verlauf der Verteidigungslinie Anfang November 1944

MS # B. 781

Schematische Gliederung der 19 Armee

Anfang Nov. 1944



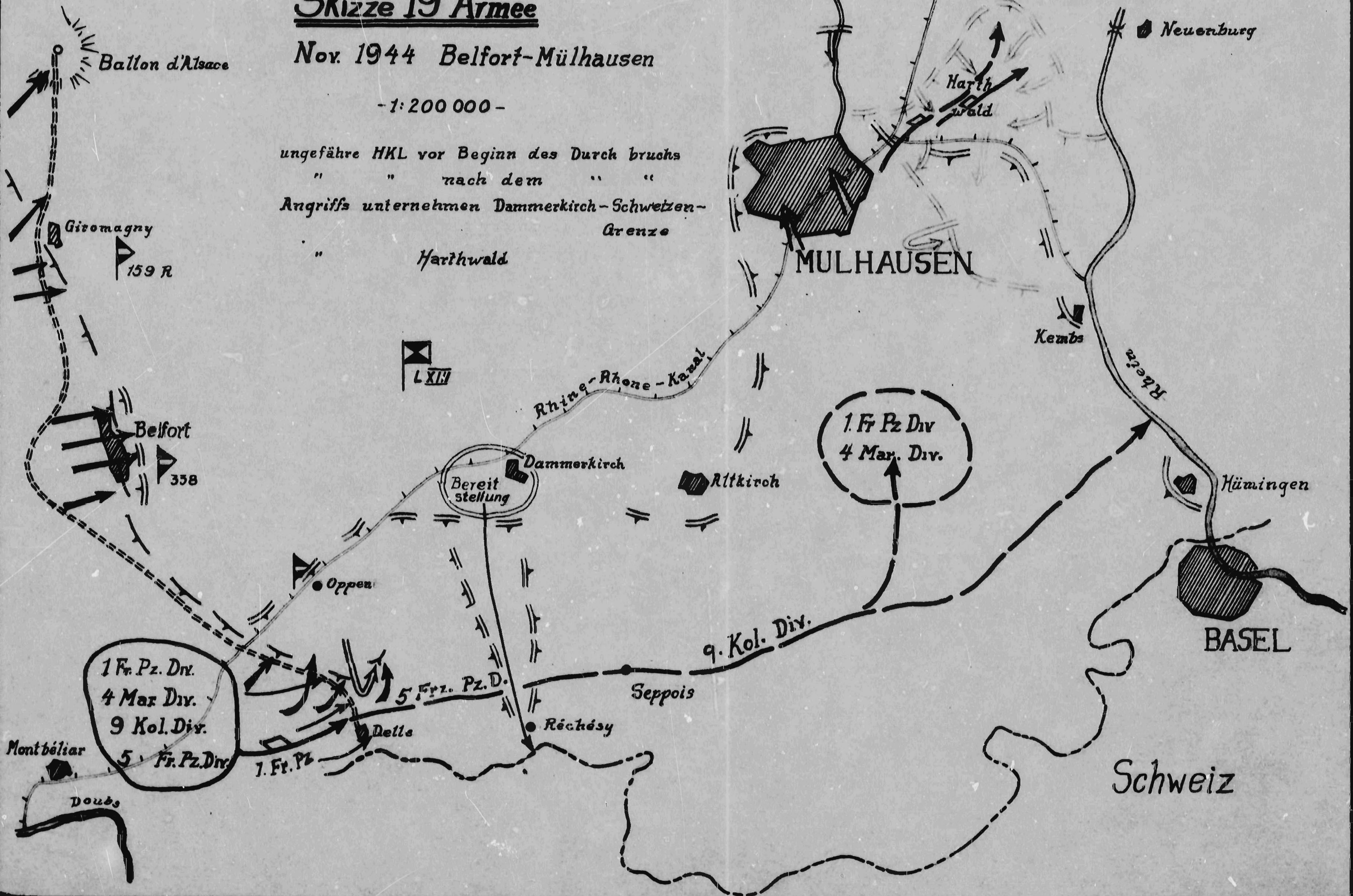
Skizze 19 Armee

Nov. 1944 Belfort-Mülhausen

- 1:200 000 -

ungefähre HKL vor Beginn des Durchbruchs
" " nach dem " "
Angriffsunternehmen Dammerkirch-Schweizer-
Grenze

" Harthwald

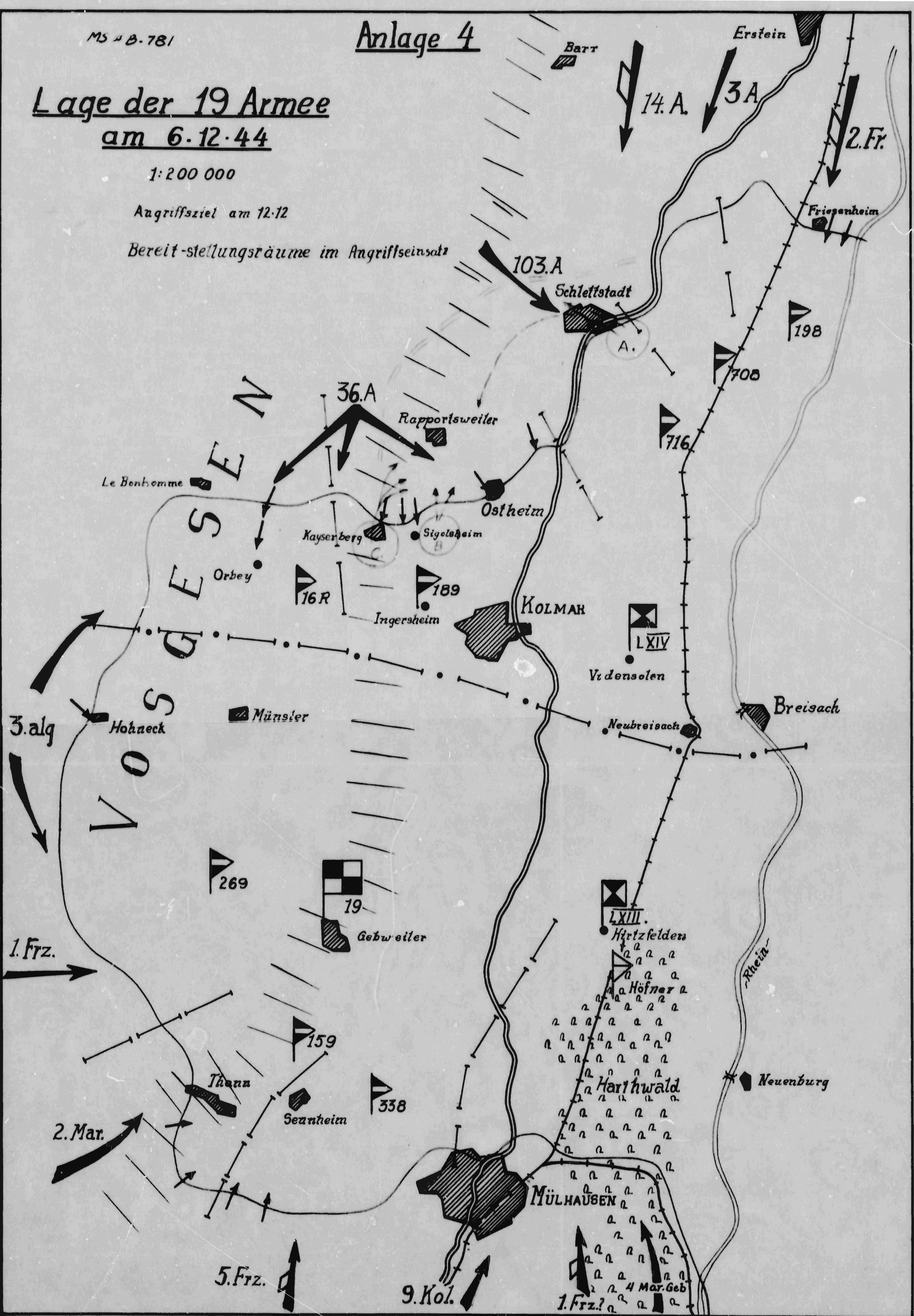


Anlage 4Lage der 19 Armee
am 6.12.44

1:200 000

Angriffsziel am 12.12

Bereitstellungsräume im Angriffseinsatz



Anlage 5

