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THE 19th ARMY IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

(1 July to 15 Sept 1944)

Remarks and Opinions of the O.B. of the 19th Army

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I. Impressions when taking over the 19th Army on 1 July 1944:

1. The troops of the Army: The troops of the Army were well disciplined and in good order, even in the rear army area. Very strict measures had been applied against irregularities, especially irregularities concerning property of the civilian population and concerning damaging the reputation of the Wehrmacht in public. Thus also the relationship to the civilian population in the army area was to be called a good and correct one.

The following points appeared to me to be especially remarkable for the judgement of the combat value of the troops:

a. Of a disadvantage concerning the personnel had to be the removal of good specialists for the Normandy front; the presence of a high percentage of ethnic Germans from the occupied areas (ethnic class III); the presence of a considerable number of older commanders not suitable for assignment in the East and the necessity to employ East battalions of the Eastern people for the defense.

b. The equipment of the division with arms and material and its transportation were scanty in comparison with those of the divisions at the Russian front. The divisions had neither assault gun battalions nor 3, 7 anti aircraft guns nor mobile mortar companies. The necessary motorization which to a certain extent might have made up for the lack of personnel by a speedy displacement to formations of main points of effort, was missing and was not to be had in spite of all efforts. There were no armored forces.

c. Three of the best infantry divisions (271, 272, 277) had been removed from the 19th Army front by the end of June 1944 for assignment in Normandy. The replacements were completely battle-weary divisions.

d. The Army became more and more the reservoir from which the O. B. West drew to replace forces in Normandy, a state of affairs which finally became serious and which was to have its consequences.

e. The troops employed were fully alert since the Normandy invasion and had thus been highly strained, a state of affairs which was soon remedied. The combat value of the Army both as concerns personnel and material was very much inferior to that of the troops at the front in Russia.

2. Organization of the defense:

a. The army's defense plan was well contrived, took into consideration every possibility and was common property of the troops. It also regulated the cooperation of all parts of the Wehrmacht assigned for defense purposes which, however, were not subordinate to the Army (Flak, Luftwaffe, Navy Military Administration, etc.) The principle was, according to higher orders, to prevent the landing on the beach itself through our own fire in connection with organizations on the ground. Thus the beach was the HKL main line of battle which had to be held. For this, however, the forces were not sufficient considering the large extent of the defense area. Thus any forces we could lay hands on had to be assigned to the main line of battle, in order to achieve a general defense at all. And thus in reality the defense could only reach a very

shallow depth with very small local reserves. The principle of holding the HKL main line of battle under all circumstances at the prevailing means and possibilities asked for the most far reaching use of tactics of counter attack as combat tactics. For systematic large scale counter attacks the reserves were lacking as well as the fast transportation for the displacement of troops. On account of the removal of such strong and numerous forces in July 1944, the occupation of the HKL main line of battle had in reality become a strong line of outposts, behind which there was almost nothing.

b. The improvement of the defense installations was yet in the growing stage. There were mainly field fortifications of little depth. The stationary concrete installations, especially for guns, got lost in the wide spaces of the terrain and did not constitute a "defense wall". Approximately 300 pillboxes were ready as far as construction goes. Roughly 80 of them were armed on a front of 650 km. It was not considerably different concerning beach defenses, barriers and mine fields. Thus the fortification of the coast exceeded only locally the frame of a light field emplacement.

c. The communication net of the Army, founded on radio and wire, suffered from the lack of material considering the enormous distances. It was scanty and improvised. The lack of radio supplies for staffs and especially for the artillery was critical. The postal wire communication net which was fully utilised, was unreliable.

d. The supply organization was good and functioned. Each corps had its solid line of supply with the necessary emergency

storage places.

To the right: Narbonne-Toulouse-Bordeaux

To the left: Route Napoleon

In the middle: The Rhone valley.

After the invasion only the main line through the Rhone valley became effective, which could even by itself supply the supplies for the whole Army for combat and for the later withdrawal movement.

3. Competencies: The army was subordinate to Army Group G command post Toulouse, to which belonged the First Army too. The intercalation of the Army Group between the First and the Nineteenth Army and the OB West proved to be appropriate considering the large areas and the cooperation of the forces in Southern France as well as for the relief of the OB West.

The parallel functioning of Army, Luftwaffe (airplanes, group organization and anti aircraft units), Navy Military Administration, and under certain circumstances of fortress engineers and construction troops was a serious hindrance and a disadvantage. If differences of opinion occurred and in case of requests made by the Army, hardly a decision was to be reached. It would have been correct if the OB of the Army who was finally responsible for the defense would have had far reaching authority.

4. Population: The population in the Army area was loyal. Their cooperation was without friction. I never witnessed any disturbances anywhere. The resistance movement made itself hardly felt in the Army area proper until the time of the invasion. Almost every day I rode over

wide areas - and that also during the invasion - without any guards in a motor car with a command post flag without coming across any hostile attitude or shooting. The reason for that may have been that the Army as far as her means allowed her to do so, helped the population wherever it could, e.g. supplying Marseilles and Nice with bread. It was different, however, in the rear of the Army area, especially in the mountainous areas of the Cevennes and the Western Alps, where the resistance movement became more and more predominant. By and by the frequent interruptions on the railroad lines through the Rhone valley North of Avignon became disturbing same as the jams of the railroad connections as a consequence of the bombing attacks on the large railroad installations North of Lyons.

5. Synopsis of the impressions:

- a. The Army was alright as far as its structure was concerned, but concerning its personnel and material it was alarmingly poor.
- b. The combat value of the troops was not to be judged as full.
- c. The coastal fortifications were still in their beginnings.
- d. In the event of an invasion one could not count on any essential support by the Luftwaffe and the naval forces.
- e. The Army area was quiet, the population behaved loyally. The insecurity in the rear of the Army and the threat to the big supply lines became more and more critical.

In this situation it was evident to the Army that in the event of an invasion it would become necessary to bring up stronger forces, especially armored formations. The fact that in the area of Toulouse-Bordeaux an armored corps was stationed as reserve of the higher command, had a quietening effect. Besides, all the Army could do concerning the rigorous orders on holding the coast under all circumstances, was chiefly to help itself by improvisations of any kind and by the most hazardous displacement of forces.

II. Opinion concerning an invasion and measures to be taken:

1. When taking over the Army on 1 July 1944 it was the opinion of the OB and of the Army Group that the invasion would probably take place at the Gulf of Lyons (Narbonne-Sete). The other possibilities under consideration were the area of the Rhone estuary and Marseilles and Toulon. From July 1944 onwards there did not really exist any more any defense point of main effort as far as forces were concerned on account of heavy transfers to the Normandy front. Nothing more was to be effected with the small forces. Only the fortress areas of Sete, Marseilles and Toulon were mere local points of main effort.

2. Early in July 1944 the Army gained the opinion based on the increasing gravity of the situation in Normandy and in connection with the impression I had won of the defense areas, that an invasion in the Gulf of Lyons had become improbable, and that it would only be sensible to start an invasion much farther to the East. A thrust through the Rhone

valley with landings on both sides of the Rhone estuary or between Toulon and Cannes was being taken into first consideration. And especially the latter area won more and more significance from the following reasons:

a. The area Toulon-Cannes was only lightly occupied and fortified (assignment of several Russian battalions in the HKL main line of battle).

b. The invasion troops had only to penetrate a depth of 30 km with a good road net - inspite of the Monts des Maures - to reach and to unite with the French resistance movement in the Western Alps.

c. After uniting with the French resistance movement in the Western Alps via the route Napoleon the approach to Grenoble would have been free to the invasion troops, and thus it would have been well possible to unhinge the entire front of the Army.

d. The nature of the beach would have allowed a landing. From this interpretation of the Army resulted the constant urgent request to the Army Group to transfer an armored division to the East of the Rhone into the area around Aix. The command of the Army was perceptibly relieved when this request was granted at the end of July 1944 and a refreshed and completely and well equipped 9th armored division was sent up. It was unfortunate that contrary to the request of the Army it was only permitted to keep parts of the 19th armored division to the East of the Rhone. whereas the better part of the division was to remain West of the Rhone, South of Nimes. In reality, however, the Army soon transferred the strongest forces of the 9th armored division to the area around Aix. When in the beginning of August 1944 the 9th armored division was transferred to Normandy the

large gap in the defense resulted in the alleged center of attack. The constantly repeated requests of the Army to have the 11th armored division brought up from the area around Toulouse to the area around Aix remained without success until the beginning of the invasion. Thus it was impossible to counter the invasion with a speedy Army force with fighting power and striking power.

3. The Army's interpretation concerning the locality and the kind of invasion lead to a series of measures to be taken, e.g.:

a. Reducing of the alert by starting to train the troops in counter attack, in tactical rides and map exercises and in range practices.

b. Surprise holdings of large scale range practices, e.g. at Bandol, to examine the artillery defense with respect to cooperation of the division, army, navy, anti aircraft and railway artillery.

c. Operational training manoeuvres of the 9th armored division.

d. Forcing of construction of field fortifications between Toulon and Cannes.

e. Map exercises of the commanding generals, at which all Wehrmacht units participated, on an invasion of the Rhone estuary and on one at both sides of St. Raphael.

The latter map exercise took place at Draguignan on 8 Aug 1944. At the end I confronted the participants with situation such as it almost materialized later on, e.g. also with strong air landings (near de Mui).

f. As an evaluation of the latter map exercise the commanding general of the LXII Army Corps in Draguignan received the order, immediately to put German companies in between the Russian battalions in the sector of Hueres-St. Raphael, to extract one regiment of the 148th reserve division from the sector near Nice and to station it as a reserve of the Corps in the area of Le Muy, to bring up an anti tank gun artillery battalion near St. Raphael and thus to effect an artillery reinforcement.

g. Since July I took special care of the Rhone bridges. I reckoned with their complete destruction before an invasion, same as it had happened in Northern France. Thus the Army had been separated into two parts and a displacement of forces was severely checked. Thus the Army special staff engineer officer and engineer commander had the urgent task to create to the largest extent emergency crossings and crossings possibilities from the Rhone estuary up to the North of Avignon. Unfortunately the Navy only offered its help too late by supplying tank landing crafts from Marseilles.

4. When at the beginning of August the Rhone - and Vaar bridges were constantly being attacked by enemy air attacks and were being increasingly destroyed, the Army was convinced that the invasion would surely be made between these two rivers. In it the Army saw the intention to cut off the supply of enforcements from West of the Rhone and from Italy, which, however, had never been intended and planned. The concentration of strong invasion forces on Corsica, in Italian ports and in North Africa was known to the Army through air reconnaissance.

However, it remained to be seen whether these forces were meant for an invasion in the South of France or in the Gulf of Genoa. The Army Liguria (Graziani) strongly reckoned with an invasion on the Gulf of Genoa. At about noon of 14 August the Army received news of the putting to sea of the invasion fleet from Corsica in a NW direction. Thus the die was cast.

15 August had to bring the decision concerning the area of the landing.

III. Concerning the invasion:

1. I got the telephone message of the Army chief concerning the Luftwaffe's report on the putting to sea of the invasion fleet from the area of Corsica to the NW while I was at the command post of the IVth Luftwaffe field corps at Gapenda, West of Narbonne, in a conference with the OB. of the Army Group concerning invasion problems on 14 Aug 44 round about noon. Therefore, the Army's interpretation concerning the area of the invasion seemed to be confirmed. This was yet corroborated by a later air report. Since the 11th armored division had already set out for the Army, no more forces were to be expected from the part of the Army Group. At this time, the invasion was most unfavorable for the Army from the following reasons:

a. The 11th armored division had to cope with a cross country march of approximately 300 km in a difficult mountainous terrain until it reached the Rhone. Though men and material had been highly strained, nothing else was left but to put them into action at

once without any rest.

b. Once could only count on the arrival of the first troops of the 11th armored division on the Rhone by 15 August. Then, however, the division was confronted by the severe obstacle of the Rhone, as the bridges had been almost completely destroyed.

c. The emergency crossing supplies for crossing the Rhone were yet very scanty inspite of all efforts. Especially equipment which was able to carry Panther tanks was lacking. Two bridge columns were not released by the Army Group.

d. The 338th infantry division was being evacuated to Normandy. One infantry regiment, 1 artillery battalion and one anti tank company had already been evacuated.

e. The antitank battalion of the 244th and 242nd infantry division were in the process of being shipped to Northern France.

f. The 716th infantry division had only received personnel replacements up to that time. Arms and vehicles were lacking, though, however, the Army had issued a certain allotment of guns, antitank guns and infantry weapons from the original installations at the coast and vehicles of the troops of the fortress areas Marseilles and Toulon.

g. The orders issued to the LXII Army Corps concerning the strengthening of the defense forces in the area of Hyeres-St. Raphael (see B No. 3) had only resulted in mixing the Russian battalions with some German companies and in assigning of antitank gun battalions North of St. Raphael. The corps headquarters of the LXII Army Corps had not yet been able to achieve the important task to detach strong reserves of the

148th reserve division and to send them to Le Muy.

In this situation there was no doubt that a landing at the weak sector Hyeres-Cannes would be successful, especially as the Army could not at all count on the assistance by air and naval forces. Therefore the Army was mainly concerned with :

- a. Intercepting the invasion and to limit it as best possible.
- b. To achieve the cessation of the evacuation of the 338th infantry division and of the antitank battalions.
- c. To draw as many troops as possible from the unattacked fronts, especially from West of the Rhone and to bring them along by improvised motorized transportation and to go as far as uncover unscrupulously further front sectors.
- d. To expedite the crossing of the Rhone with new emergency means, in which case we had to fall back on the Navy's barges and men from Marseilles which had been refused us until then.
- e. To try to flatten the beachheads with the troops which had been brought up.

These were the dispositions of the orders which were issued by the Army on 14 and 15 August.

2. Early on 15 Aug 1944 the Army had won an approximate impression on the invasion area (Cap Benat-Cannes). The procedure of the invasion, too, was according to expectations. During 15 August the impressions on the situation soon became more and more complete concerning the extension of the beachhead and of the air landings in the area of

Le Muy. It was the concern of the local leadership (242 infantry division) to limit the advance of the enemy (especially to put up obstacles on the coastal roads and in the Monts des Maures); it tried to do its best with its limited means by making counter thrusts and local counter attacks.

However, the local leadership was confronted with tasks which could not be solved, as the Russian battalions did not put up any resistance, and therefore, large gaps were torn immediately.

The loss of the LXII corps headquarters through the air landings at Le Muy was another disadvantage. Here the repercussions of the corps headquarters irresolution concerning the drawing of strong forces from the Nice sector became evident. There was no longer any connection between the various parts of the leadership in the invasion sector and it was not re-established. There was no continuous line of resistance around the beachhead. The Army was mainly concerned with the encirclement of the Draguignan Route Napoleon. Thus, inspite of the existing restriction, on 15 August the occupation troops of the Marseilles fortress area were drawn in. Regiment Bruendel of the 244th infantry division coupled with the motorized anti aircraft battalion Tyroller were temporarily motorized and brought up on the road Brignoles-Le Lue, in order to attack the air landings in the area of Le Muy in order to relieve the corps headquarters of the LXII Army Corps which was encircled in Draguignan. Besides parts of the 148th reserve division were assigned to the same tasks from the East. The attack of the reinforced regiment Bruendel early on 16 August originally won much ground, but then it was smashed up by enemy air force and parachute troops. The parts of the 148th

reserve division did not become effective in time. When on 16 August I was at the battle front of the 242nd infantry division, the beachhead had been essentially widened already, and there was no longer any continuous front. It was a fight of small groups. The Monts des Maures were lost, we were fighting near Le Lue already. The fighting of the next few days was conducted in delaying actions from one line of resistance to the next, that is, starting from Hyeres Le Lue with the front to the South-East. During these days the Army won the impression that three American divisions were preceeding in a front in the direction of Aix, whereas parts undertook the outflanking via Draguignan. The utilization of the open road to Grenoble remained obscure, as from 15 August any air reconnaissance of our own was lacking. It was further being recognized that the encirclement of Toulon by French divisions had started. In order to bar the open road from Draguignan to Greenoble the 148th reserve division received the order from the Army to cut off and to block the road North of Draguignan to Grenoble with all forces which had been drawn out and which were coming up. However, this order was no longer being carried out, as the OKW, without having asked the Army, had subordinated the 148th reserve division to the Liguria Army and had given them the task to block the Alpine passes to Italy. The order of the OKW to the 157th mountain division in Grenoble to block the Route Napoleon South of Grenoble was not being carried out and would not have been of any help to the Army.

3. Approximately on 19 or 20 Aug 1944 we were successful in stopping for the first time the advance of the enemy on both sides of Aix with the aid of the first parts of the 11th armored division and

in putting up a line of resistance approximately from the Durance-Aix-Etamp de Berre. Assigned were the remainders of the 242nd infantry division, the 338th infantry division which had been brought up (with the exception of one reinforced regiment, which had been evacuated), parts of the 11th armored division and the 198th infantry division which had been brought up. The 198th infantry division was stationed North of the Durance, echeloned to the left rear in order to prevent an outflanking towards Avignon.

The Army was unable to understand why at that time the advantage of the open road to Grenoble had not been utilized by the enemy for a large scale operation, which would have resulted in the annihilation of the 19th Army and which would thus have found the road open to the Belfort Gap.

IV. The withdrawal of the 19th Army:

1. Order: In the evening of 17 Aug 1944 the Army received the completely surprising order of the OB West to withdraw from the OB. of the Army Group who had arrived in the forenoon of 17 Aug 1944 on the command post in Avignon. The wire was worded approximately like this: "The 19th Army will withdraw with all Wehrmacht parts assigned there through the Rhone valley into the area of Chalons sur Saone. Each hour is precious. No more orders will be issued."

Thus the Army was confronted with a task hardly to be achieved, for it has to be remembered that up to that time even to

consider the idea of withdrawal had been prohibited, and that even the urgent representations concerning this made by the Army had even been rejected after the invasion succeeded.

2. Situation: At that time the enemy had extended his beachhead approximately up to the line of Etang de Berre-Aix-Dranguignan-Cannes and had encircled Toulon and cordoned off Marseilles. To the North the road to Grenoble was open to him with favorable possibilities to encircle the Army. His landings on the beachhead were completely unimpeded. The Army had no insight into it, as any air reconnaissance was lacking. The whole mountain area of the Western Alps and of the Cevennes was in the hands of the French resistance movement. The situation in the Rhone valley North of Avignon was obscure. The enemy air force made the crossing of the Rhone very difficult and developed a vivid fighter bomber activity on all roads. All the Rhone bridges up to Montelimar had been completely destroyed, except the railroad bridge near Avignon which was still in use for pedestrians and light vehicles.

Our own forces stood West of the Rhone up to the Pyrenees and were still defending the coast, namely the 716th infantry division the 189th reserve division, the Navy and the local coastal troops under the leadership of the IVth Luftwaffe field corps. Behind them were the Luftwaffe ground organizations and all administrative offices of troops of the Military Administration up to and including Toulon. These troops had to negotiate more than 300 km till they reached the Rhone and that with very scanty means of transportation, in order to make contact with the Army. To the East of the Rhone and assigned against the invasion

troops were the 11th armored division and under the leadership of the LXXXV Army Corps the 198th infantry division, the 338th infantry division (less one reinforced regiment), and the remaining parts of the 242nd infantry division. The corps headquarters of the LXII Army Corps, the bulk of the 242nd infantry division and one regiment of the 242nd infantry division had been lost. According to order the bulk of the 244th infantry division remained as occupation troops in Marseilles. The 148th reserve division had been taken from the Army.

The terrain of the Rhone valley was the worst possible for the ordered withdrawal - mountains on both sides, many defiles, increasing activity of the resistance movement, excellent possibilities for the enemy to block the routes of retreat.

These were the conditions given which the Army had to make the basis of its plan of withdrawal.

3. The plan of withdrawal:

a. Two groups were created for the withdrawal: West of the Rhone all troops and administrative offices were subordinated to the corps headquarters IV of the Luftwaffe field corps. As combat units it kept the 716th infantry division and the 189th reserve division, both of which were very weak divisions as concerns personnel and material. Any crossings across the Rhone, even of small dispersed groups, had been prohibited by the Army.

East of the Rhone the LXXXV Army Corps lead all the troops with the exception of the 11th armored division.

b. The 11th armored division remained directly sub-

ordinate to the Army and could only be assigned by it. Thus the Army wanted to keep at its disposal the one and only strong and mobile unit, for any subordination, even of parts only, to the corps headquarters would have lead to a dispersal and finally to a giving up of this combat force.

c. As the final line for the withdrawal proper of all forces of the Army a line of resistance was ordered approximately at the height of Aix-Nimes-Cavaillon. It was to be held until dusk of 23 August. Up to that time all troops of the administrative offices had to be brought up to this line. By this measure the Army wanted to preserve the contact and to safeguard an orderly leadership.

d. The withdrawal itself had been laid down from one line of resistance to the next at a distance of 25 km in such a fashion that the movements had to be effected during darkness, whereas during the day the momentary line of resistance had to be held. Precautionary measures for the keeping in contact of both groups with the Army had been set up for each line of resistance and also for the case of crossing the Rhone. According to the situation the Army did not think it possible to achieve a regular withdrawal of both groups.

4. Execution of the withdrawal plan: The withdrawal plan of the Army found the approval of the OB. of the Army Group and was at once converted into orders. On 18 August the chiefs of corps and special leaders were briefed according to preliminary orders by the Army chief at a conference in Avignon. As far as time was concerned the completion of the operation up to Chalons sur Saone was almost made according to plan,

with the exception of some days delay, which resulted from the crises near Montelimar and Lyons. Decisive for the success of the withdrawal were especially:

- a. That everywhere the strict leadership was made possible and that it was possible to keep contact through the procedure of withdrawal. At no time had the Army been deprived of its leadership.
- b. That the Army kept the 11th armored division to itself and thus remained able to operate.
- c. That through the withdrawal order the Army was left at its own discretion for its execution and that it was neither limited nor bound by any orders during the withdrawal operation.
- d. That the troops kept up admirable endurance and combat attitude inspite of the incredible demands made.
- e. That the enemy did not utilize the many possibilities of success which he had, but fought systematically and all out for safety.

V. The crisis Montelimar-Lorriol-Drome: The withdrawal had started according to plan from the line of resistance (starting line) Nimes-Arles-Cavaillon during the night of 23/24 August, though the demands made on the troops were unimaginably high. However, the good possibility to overtake the troops in pursuit and the cutting off of the line of retreat of the Army in the Rhone valley by the enemy who was at an advantage through the terrain and according to the own free will of the enemy the gap was already blocked (sic). There resulted severe blockings of the parts (columns,

trains) which had been sent in advance and which were not needed for combat. The 11th armored division got the road Montelimar-Livron, free through fighting. However, it was not successful in opening up the gap without being subjected to direct enemy fire. It was, however, possible to affect the traffic gradually and during darkness, even if it had to be interrupted at times.

2. Concentrated attack for the purpose of widening the basis of the march through: In a situation as shown above, it was not possible to achieve a march through of all parts of the LXXXV Army Corps which stood to the East of the Rhone, and which besides were under pressure of the enemy fighting them. Thus the Army decided to create a broader basis for the march through by fighting for it. For the attack the 198th infantry division and the anti aircraft regiment Tyroller were brought up by forced marches to Espeluche, South East of Montelimar. With these forces of the railway artillery battalion 640 and the 11th armored division the commander of the 11th armored division was to make an attack at 1100 hours on 25 August to gain a second march route via Boulieu-Grane-Allex. When in the afternoon of 24 August I gave the commander of the 11th armored division at his command post directly East of Montelimar the order to attack, the latter showed me the captured American operational order for the operation North of Montelimar which contained important information. Now every hour counted for our own attack. No consideration could be taken in this situation of the severe fatigue of the 198th infantry division. Though the attack won us some ground, contrary to expectations it did not attain the aim to which it had aspired.

3. Development of the situation between 26 and 28 Aug 44:

After the failure of the attack of 25 August the Army was in a more threatening situation, especially as the space became more and more narrow and as the enemy was several times successful in temporarily blocking the Rhone valley roads through armored assaults. The overcrowded Montelimar and the blocked Rhone valley roads presented an alarming view. It was possible only thanks to very strict traffic control regulations and the attitude of the soldiers time and again to achieve some movement and to produce some order, and that under the heavy enemy fire. As a new danger presented themselves the clear outflanking from the area of Crest, the alarming news from Valence, and the reported occupation of Romans le Bourg by American troops and the French resistance movement. Thus the Army felt the need to free the 11th armored division as quick as possible. On 26 August the advancing corps headquarters of the LXXXV Army Corps in Espeluche was charged with the command for the whole area of Montelimar.

The 11th armored division was detached and the Army gave it the task to repel the enemy at Alex-Crest, to prevent a cutting off of the retreat road Lorriol-Valence and to reestablish the situation at Romans le Bourg with a combat unit and thus to prevent a cutting off of the Isere crossing North of Valence. The corps headquarters of the LXXXV Army Corps received the order to expedite the relief of the parts of the 11th armored division on the road Montelimar-Lorriol with the 338th infantry division which, on account of slight enemy pressure at the Southern front could be replaced by a blocking unit, and thus to keep the Rhone road open until the Montelimar pocket had been evacuated.

With the reinforced 198th infantry division the corps was to break through to the Rhone valley road via Condillac. These orders were issued for 27 August. However, neither the 27th nor the 28th brought any satisfactory solution. In the evening of 28 August the bulk of the LXXXV Army Corps was encircled and in a desperate situation.

Ath this time the 11th armored division was fighting hard to the East of Livron. On 26 August the Army headquarters was transferred from Lapalude (South East of Montelimar) to a place approximately 3 km to the North East of Livron and on 28 August to Valence. The sudden high water of the Drome, which it was only possible to cross at fords, lead to a severe stoppage of the draining-off movement and to considerable losses. It was very fortunate that on 28 August the high waters ebbed off.

4. The whole situation and the situation in the pocket of Montelimar had come to such a head during 28 August, that still during the night of 28/29 August with the chief of the Army at the field headquarters of the 11th armored division some kilometers to the Northeast of Livron I had a conference with the commanding general of the LXXXV army corps and with the commander of the 11th armored division, in order to make the decisions which had become necessary. The commanding general gave a report of the desperate situation. The commander of the 11th armored division had no more troops to help in the pocket. His division was already fighting at 4 points. I ordered the commanding general of the LXXXV Army corps at once to send all staff officers at his disposition to the troops in the pocket and to give them the order to form small combat groups and to free themselves from the pocket towards Valence

during the night. The corps headquarters was to build a line of resistance to the South of Valence, there receive the troops which had freed themselves from the pocket and were to take over the command in Valence. The 11th armored division was to protect the reception of the troops. It can almost be called a miracle that these tasks were achieved. It has to be credited to the tenacity and bravery and the unceasing efforts of the soldiers and especially of the officers. Thus we succeeded to extract from the Montelimar pocket the bulk of the combat troops, even though they were weakened as concerns personnel and material, and to set up formations for the retreat behind the ordered line of resistance South of Valence. The further retreat was again a fortunate one, as the Isere bridge at Pont d'Isere, the only crossing of this main obstacle, had not been destroyed .

VI. Lyons: The retreat from Lyons to Valence was effected at high speed without any incidents. The enemy only slightly followed the front. Parts of the 11th armored division protected the right flank and the rear, whereas the bulk accelerated its march to Lyons. There was contact with the IVth Luftwaffe field corps to the West of the Rhone. It had got through rather unmolestedly and was therefore at an advantage. The corps achievement concerning organization, leadership and marching achievement have to receive special recognition. The corps was a welcome assistance to the Army for the fighting which was to be expected around Lyons. The first alarming news of a revolt and fighting to the East of the town, had

already reached Valence. The Army had to reckon with the further intention of the enemy to block its retreat through an overtaking pursuit. It was near Lyons that the Army saw the most favorable opportunity for this as far as situation and terrain were concerned. That became disastrous considering the state of the troops. Besides the question remained unanswered whether or not the enemy would dare to make the courageous and yet most effective assault along the Swiss border towards Belfort. This serious worry never left the Army. However, at Valence the Army decided to assign forces of the IVth Luftwaffe field corps to Lyons, and quickly to draw through Lyons the LXXXV Army Corps which had become very battle weary through Montelimar, and to have it reach Chalons sur Saone by marching to the East of the Saone, in the hope to keep it out of fighting for some days. Apart from protective tasks the 11th armored division remained strictly at disposal of the Army, and its aim was Lyons first of all. The orders were given accordingly. The IVth Luftwaffe field corps released the 189th division for Lyons, which forming a bridgehead to the South and East of Lyons, which had to be held until such time when the LXXXV Army Corps had been received. Then the town's evacuation according to plan was to be effected and the retreat to Chalons sur Saone to the West of the Saone was to follow. The town commander of Lyons was subordinated with all the forces there (security battalions, schools, etc.) to the commander of the 189th reserve division West of the Rhone no contact had been made with the enemy proper. However, there were unconfirmed reports of the occupation of St. Etienne by French troops.

The AOK found the town quiet when it arrived in Lyons in the evening of 31 August. The town commander reported that the revolt had been defeated with his own troops and with the decisive assistance of the anti aircraft battalion of the 11th armored division which had been newly formed in Lyons, and that he were the master of the situation, while there was fighting to the East of the town. The situation became dangerous once more when from the area West of Amperieux reports arrived about the river Ain crossing of American troops. Thereupon the 11th Armored Division was given the order to throw this enemy back across the Ain to protect the Army's line of retreat to Chalons sur Saone. For this purpose it was to occupy Bourg en Bresse. It was a model execution of this order which was achieved in bitter fighting.

We had never intended to defend Lyons. The Army was mainly concerned for the time being unmolestedly and as quick as possible to reach Chalons sur Saone. The breathing spell in Lyons was very welcome to the Army for organizing its units. Approximately 3000 soldiers could be fed, rested and equipped in stragglers' collecting points. Thus a valuable fighting force could be made available to the divisions. No destruction of the town and its essential plants were ordered for Lyons. Only the mining of the numerous bridges across the Rhone and Saone were prepared hurriedly and were effected according the plan when the town was given up sector by sector. This tactical measure lead to the delayed following of the enemy and gave some start to the Army. In the whole the retreat of the Army along both banks of the Saone was effected according to plan. Near Villefranche the first encounter with French armored forces

resulted in a local crisis for the rear guard and in sorties. Here again it is the merit of the 11th armored division to have made possible the retreat of the Army through hard combat near Maximieux and Bourg.

Contrary to expectations the Army was thus rid of its worries concerning the Lyons area. It was well in charge of all the units and was evidently relieved when it reached the large gate in front of the Belfort Gap.

VII. The fight for the Belfort Gap: The first half of the month of September 1944 is under the sign of our own endeavor to advance in one front towards the Belfort Gap and the Vosges, to intercept the enemy advance and to bring it to a standstill. It is a race between both parties. On our part we have to reckon with:

- a. The battle weary and personally and materially highly weakened troops and,
- b. To achieve two special tasks, namely the reception of the remaining parts of the First Army and later on to keep open the Plateau de Langres for our own intentions of attack.

On the other hand on the side of the enemy only the long lines of supply from the Mediterranean were being considered as hindering the operations. It could not be called decisive in view of the enemy's enormous technical possibilities.

1. Reception of the remaining parts of the First Army: On

2 September (7) at Chalons sur Saone the Army received the order from the OB. of the Army Group to hold the general line Autun-Chalons sur Saone along the river Doubs until such time when the remaining parts of the First Army had been received which were expected to come via Bourges-Nevers-Autun. The estimate was approximately 1000 men of all Wehrmach parts, among them the LXIV Army Corps and the LXVI Army Corps.

At the beginning of the invasion in the area of Toulon-Bayonne-Poitiers these parts had received the order to fight their way back South of the Loire towards Dijon.

This order had been a severe load for the Army. Every day of freedom of movement would have been necessary to block the Belfort Gap. Same as before the Army had to reckon with the fact, that the enemy might undertake to penetrate by assault with strong forces along the Swiss border and via Bessancon. There, however, we had none of our own troops. According to estimate the coming through of the parts of the First Army could last up to one week. On 4 September on both sides of Chalons sur Saone there were under the leadership of the IV Luftwaffe field corps the 716th infantry division and the ^{189th Res.} ~~338th~~ ^{338th and 198th} ~~infantry~~ ^{Division}, and the ^{189th} ~~169th~~ infantry division on the Doubs almost up to Besancon. Around Besancon there was the 11th armored division, which had the task to prevent a breaking through of the enemy from Besancon to the Swiss border. * However, the situation especially in the area of Besancon-Swiss border came more and more to a head and resulted in a severe crisis.

2. The race for the Belfort Gap: On 6 September for the

first time forces of the 3rd American Division had appeared directly West

* Omission: The Army actually succeeded approximately by 8 Sept. in receiving the elements of First Army and preventing an enemy breakthrough.

of Besancon. They had succeeded in establishing a small bridgehead across the Doubs near Avanne. There and South of Besancon the 11th armored division fought. However, it had not been successful in smashing the bridgehead. Before that time already the field commander of Besancon had been ordered to block the road to Besancon at Pontarlier with security battalions and thus to delay the enemy advance. He did not execute this order. When, approximately on 7 September, the 159th reserve division and one improvised staff of corps were brought up to the Army to Besancon, then the 11th armored division could be set free to meet the enemy advance on Baumes les Dames, to carry out a blocking of the Swiss border near Blamont and to defend this line. Through full effort in hard, alternating and clever fighting it has executed this task. The improvised corps headquarters which had been brought up to Besancon, was given the order to defend ^{*the area on the Doubs*} ~~Besancon~~ ^{*sides of Besancon*} on both ~~banks of the Doubs~~ with the 159th reserve division and to keep contact to the right to the 338th infantry division and to the left to the 11th armored division. The bridgehead at Avannes was to be flattened. The corps headquarters had too strongly been attracted by Besancon. Thus the enemy was successful in breaking through from the bridgehead of Avannes ^{*to*} in a pincer movement around Besancon on 7 September. A flattening of the bridgehead was no longer in question, especially as the 11th armored division was fully occupied by its mission. In order to counteract the encirclement of Besancon, the Army decided to dare to undertake to draw the 198th and the 338th infantry division under the leadership of the IVth Luftwaffe field corps out of the Doubs front at night, in order to attack the enemy the following morning (7 or 8 September)

along the Dole-Besancon road and to defeat him. Unfortunately this attack had no success. Then on the whole of the front of the IVth Luftwaffe field corps and at Besancon followed the necessary withdrawal on account of strong enemy pressure, ^{not without} ~~during there were~~ some crises, until on 15 September approximately the line Vessoul-Villersexel had been reached. Only with the aid of numerous battalions, formed from stragglers and which ^{were} ~~were~~ lead to the Villersexel area by the LXXXV Army Corps which had to prepare Besancon for its defense, was it possible to build up a ^{continuous} ~~constant~~ line of defense here.

Thus the Army had yet succeeded to block and to defend the Belfort Gap. In the execution of this task the Army was still bound to the mentioned second special task, namely the keeping open of the Plateau de Langres. Even though for this purpose the LXIV Army Corps had been ^{attached} ~~assigned~~ and had been ~~solely~~ assigned from Langres to Versoul, ^(excl.) this task bereaved us of the operational freedom for the whole of the front.

It was an enigma to the Army, why the enemy did not execute the decisive assault on Belfort between 8 and 15 September 1944 through a large scale attack. The re-grouping of the American and French forces of which I learned now, came just in time for the Army and gave it the necessary breathing spell to block and to hold the Belfort Gap.

Sketch Southern France

1: 1 000 000

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 km

Concerning the fighting of the 19th Army

 Situation of approximately 19 August

Chalons-sur-Saone

 Situation and termination line on 23 August

Bourg

 Montelimar

Villefranche

 Lyons

Lyons

St. Etienne

Grenoble

Valence

Montelimar

Western
AlpsArmy Group
Toulouse

Cevennes

Avignon

Montpellier

Cannes

Marseilles

Gulf of Lyons

Toulon

Sketch of the battle of the 19th Army for
the Belfort Gap

_____ Situation on 6 Sep 1944 (Approximately)

- - - - Situation on 15 Sep 1944 (")

1: 1 000 000

0 10 20 30 km

Neufchateau

Epinal

Gerardmer

Lanores

Muel-
house

Vesoul

Belfort

Villersexel

Montbeliar

Blamont

Cray

Baume

Dijon

Besancon

Parts of the First Army

Switzerland

Chalon-sur-Saone

Pontarlier

Group Rhineland / Southern France

Neustadt, 4 March 1948

Commentary

To the report " the 19th Army in Southern France from 1 July to 15 Sep 1944. -- Remarks and opinions of the OB. of the 19th Army.--" (MS # B-787) by General of the infantry Friedrich Wiese.

In the present report the former commanding officer of the 19th Army stresses the essential characteristics of the battle in Southern France without going into details: Impressions and views on a possible invasion during the time from 1 July to 15 September 1944, the invasion itself, the withdrawal of the 19th Army through the Rhone valley, the battle for the Belfort Gap.

It is a valuable report as it provides the large framework for the war history of the campaign in Southern France. The considerations of the Army's leadership as well as the state of the troops and the essential operations are being treated. Opposed to this is the judgment of the enemy. Details of the fighting itself can be learned from the reports of the then subordinate commanders, and thus the picture of the campaign in Southern France will be rounded off.

(signed) Werner Drews

(Werner D r e w s)

Group West

Neustadt, 11 April 1948

To the Historical Division

General of the infantry WIESE describes the course of the withdrawal of the 19th Army from the Mediterranean to the Belfort Gap.

It is interesting to read how low the commanding officer of the 19th Army rates the power of resistance of his Army which was constantly weakened through current transfers to the Normandy front. Directly after the invasion began as well as during the following time the WFST (armed forces operations staff) could not make a full decision; it had only sent a trickle of reinforcements to the Normandy front, which had been taken from the unattacked front sectors - with the exception of the 15th Army. Thus these, too, were so much weakened that they were no longer in a position with any hope of success to ward off a second landing of the enemy. The 19th Army, too, was thus affected. Therefore, the problem raised already before has to be raised anew, whether it would not have been more to the purpose to give up Southern and Western France at an early date and thus to create the necessary operational forces through the resulting essential shortening of the front. It was no longer essential to cling to areas, but to repulse the enemy's invasion army; then we could again think of winning areas.

As considerations of this kind had been valued as defeatism up to that time, the withdrawal order of 17 August was a complete surprise to the 19th Army and also to the reinforced LXIV Army Corps - after AOK 1 had been transferred the LXIV Corps headquarters became the leading

command authority for the German units which were assigned between the Loire and the Pyrenees at the Atlantic front.

The difficulties encountered in the withdrawal which had not been prepared in any way, have been worked out impressively. The withdrawal was full of crises. Already in the beginning the loss of the LXII corps during the most important moment opened a gap in the leadership which was to have its consequences. Then followed the crises of Montelimar and Romans. When fortunately the area of Chalons had been reached, the order to await the remaining parts of the reinforced LXIV army corps on the line of Autun-Chalons lead to new worries. These concerned mainly the left flank: Besancon-Swiss border. There was the last possibility for the enemy to switch over to the overtaking pursuit and to thrust through to the Belfort Gap. It then remained unimaginable to us why on 16 August the enemy did not start to overtake us in pursuit with his main forces along the Swiss border, as he was in possession of Draguignan and thus to approach to the route Napoleon. The road was open: the 148th reserve infantry division was subordinate to the OB Southwest (Army Group Italy) and - kept back for a short while contrary to orders - had been taken back to the Alpine passes and the 157th reserves infantry division which was subordinate to the OB Southwest, too, - had been pressed back to the passes by maquis units, had freed the road to Grenoble. According to later knowledge a re-grouping of American and French units caused the later ~~omission~~ missing of the breakthrough from the Besancon area in the direction towards Belfort.

If this were correct, then this would constitute a parallel

to a similarly missed opportunity South of the Seine, where a delay caused by the relief of American troop units by British troop units made it possible for the German units to get away to the North across the Seine.

The stopping which occurred on the line Autun-Chalons-Besancon made possible:

1. The merger of the two large groups of the Army Group "G" -- 19th Army and reinforced LXIV Army Corps --
2. Had left open the possibility of a German operation from the area of Langras-Dijon against the free Southern flank of the 3rd American Army which was progressing in the direction of Verdun-Metz. It has already been mentioned elsewhere that this offensive which was planned by the 5th Armored Army, miscarried.

The report of General WIESE which stresses all essentials, is especially noteworthy for a utilization in respect of a history of war. In connection with the report (MS # B-800) of General Oberst Blaskowitz "The fighting of Army Group G in Southern France" which gives a survey on larger lines and together with the report (MS # B-696) of the Chief of the Generalstaff of the 19th Army, Generalleutnant BOTSCH: "The course of the withdrawal of the 19th Army from Southern France", which gives a very impressive picture of the withdrawal, excellent documents on the course of the withdrawal of the 19th Army from Southern France are at the disposal of the Historical Division.

(Signed) Brandenberger

(BRANDENBERGER)

Enclosures: 1 report of 30 pages, 2 sketches, 1 commentary by Oberstleutnant DREWS, 1 indication of authorities used.

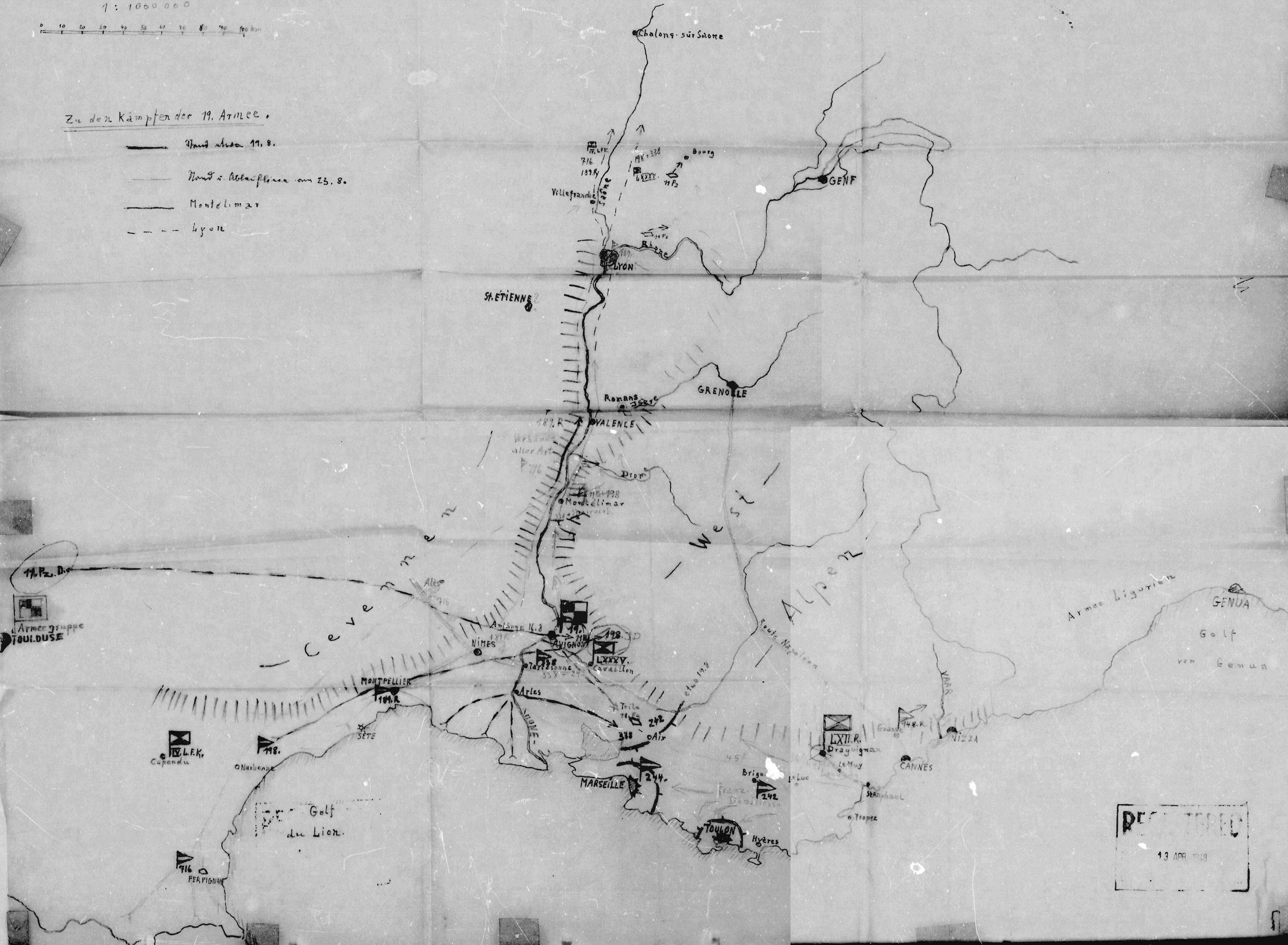
Übersichtsskizze Südfrankreich

1:1000000



Zu den Kämpfen der 19. Armee.

- Front Mitte 19. 8.
- Front z. Abzugsphase am 23. 8.
- Montelimar
- Lyon



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13 APR 1948

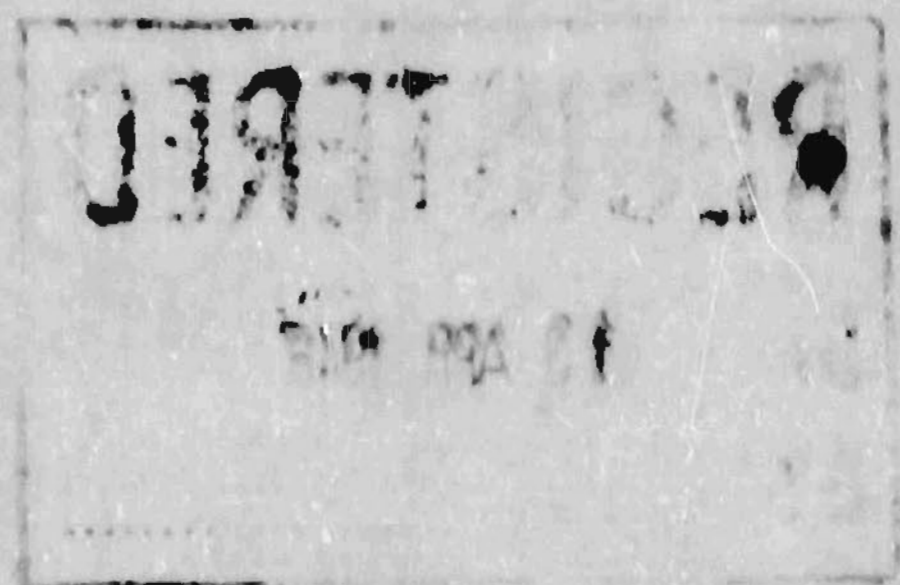
Skizze zu den Kämpfen der 19. Armee um die burgundische Pforte.

Neufchâteau

B - 787

— Lage am 6.9.44 (ungefähr),
- - - Lage am 15.9.44 (").

1:1000000
0 10 20 30 km.



Teile 1. Armee

