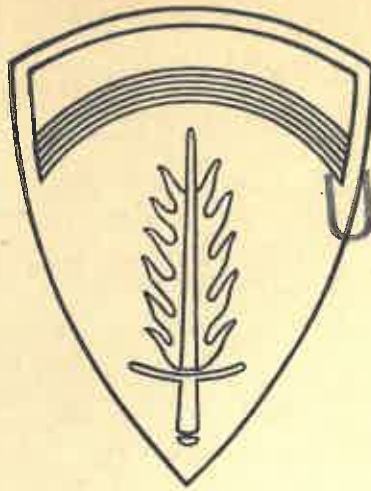


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11th PANZER DIVISION IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

(15 AUG - 14 SEP 44)

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ELEVENTH PANZER DIVISION IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

(15 Aug - 14 Sept 44)

By

von Wietersheim - Major-General, former Commander of the 11
Panzer Division

Translator : W.B. Ross

Historical Division
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UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE
1953

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Prefatory.

Organization, evaluation of striking power, and missions before employment in the Rhone Valley.

1. Since the end of July, the 11 Pz. Div had stood as a reserve force of the Army Group 'G', which had its field headquarters at Bouffiac, near Toulouse. Army Group 'G' was under the command of General Blaskowitz at the time. The staff headquarters of the division was located at St. Ferreol, near Revel; the Commander at that time was Major-General Wietersheim, - myself..... The 11 Pz. Div. had been newly constituted - with the addition of the 273. Reserve Division to those portions withdrawn from the East - at the end of the month of June in the region of Bordeaux. After the start of the invasion just at that time one battalion of the tank regiment - (some fifty tanks Type IV) - had to be given up, and the guns of the Army Anti-aircraft Battalion 277 had not then been brought up. With this exception, the fighting portions of the Division were up to strength both in personnel and in material. Surplus to strength there were present the 110 'Dalhaus' Battalion, the 11 Pz. Artillerie Abteilung, one heavy rocket-projector battery as part of the artillery regiment, and the Divisional Escort Company at double strength.

Detachments of the Division and their commanding officers:-

Pz Regt 15....Col. STENKHOFF	Pz Jg Abt 61.....Major KESSLER
Pz Gr Regt 110.. " HAX	Pz Pion Batl 209... " ROEDIGER

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Pz Gr Regt 110...Maj-Gen Wilde Heeresflakabt...Major MENZEL
Pz Aufkl Abt 11...Maj. BODE Pz Div N. Abt 89.. " STEUER
Pz Art Regt 119...Maj-Gen HAMMON

The supply troops were completely efficient, up to any demands which might be made on them.

Estimate of the quality of the troop detachments.

The men in the Division were mostly from the Baltic and Russia, although the original nucleus of East Germans remained intact in spite of the fact that the Division had been recently reformed. The stage of training reached was good although the fact that the last detachments did not come up until the beginning of August rather disturbed their training program. The Commander laid particular stress on the importance of initiative in the ranks of the N.C.O.'s; the training of small units reinforced by tanks and artillery-spotters was particularly good.

Only 60 % of the specified strength of the companies of the armored infantry regiments and the sapper and engineering battalions were to be sent into active duty; the remainder being held back and formed into a field replacement battalion. Such a measure was observed with the object of avoiding unnecessary losses as a result of the superiority of the enemy in artillery and planes and also, by this device it was easy to make up lacks in battalions which had suffered heavy casualties with speed and dispatch and the replacements found

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themselves in surroundings familiar to them and thus, the fighting value of such a battalion did not sink. This measure was to be maintained during the fighting in the Rhone Valley.

3. The 11 Panzer Division was located about three hours' march away from the coast - in the neighborhood of Toulouse, so as to be sent to meet the enemy immediately in the event of an Allied landing in Southern France. The higher leaders were of the opinion that there was a possibility of a landing in three places:-

a). On both sides of Marbonne, and possibly, also another simultaneously on the Atlantic coast in the region of the mouth of the river Gironde, so as to break the link with Spain and call forth a general uprising in Southern France.

b). In the delta of the river Rhone, so as to cut off the German forces in Southern France by means of a push through the valley of that river against Lyons.

c). Along the coast of the France-Italian Riviera, so as to advance from there either into the Rhone Valley or against Northern Italy. So the roads which would come into consideration and the possibilities with regard to what troops could be used were explored.

4. The Division's estimate of the situation.

In the event of an enemy landing an enemy bridgehead could only be hemmed in by a single tank division on our side if the

division attacked in concentrated formation shortly after the landing occurred, - i.e. - in the enemy's moment of greatest weakness. And the distance to be traversed to the first possible landing-point was 300 kms, - to the second and third from 400 to 500 kms. This signified, for a tank formation in normal circumstances a march of from two to three days, if it was to be sent into battle on reaching its destination. But in the conditions under which they would march in this case they would have to take into consideration the influence of the enemy airforce, and unless they were prepared to incur very heavy losses it would take them about that time - from four to six days. And this did not take into consideration the possible delay supervening as a result of the destruction of the bridges over the Rhone - as in fact did occur when the time came. And with the conditions imposed on it by the time element, the Division had not been able to change to another and more favorable assembly. All this meant that the success of an attack by a single division was extremely questionable if the Allies landed in the Rhone delta or east of the river and had a chance to funnel sufficient troops into their landing bridgehead during the early days. The impression of the Division was that the higher leadership had taken into consideration the possibility of a landing on the Atlantic coast and the need for securing the link with Southern France when it abstained from moving the troops to another assembly area.

The transfer to the eastern bank of the Rhone

L. On 13 Aug the Division's Commander received a verbal order from the Commander in Chief of Army Group 'G' personally at the latter's field headquarters in Rouffiac, to move the Division to the area of Nimes - Arles. The shift began that same evening - the Division's new command post being located between Avignon and Villaneuve and the Division was presumably to be placed subordinate to the 19 Army. During his conversation with the C.I.C. the Commander of the Division had been enlightened as to the general situation with regard to the strength of the enemy and the disposition of his forces, which seemed to indicate that a landing east of the mouth of the Rhone could be awaited within the next few days. So the Division moved forward to its new location that evening as stated, sending ahead a part of the Staff accompanied by advance detachments of the divisional regiments.

The main route followed was through Carcassone - Beziers - Montpellier - to Nimes. The enemy's air superiority made it necessary for us at first only to move at night time and to cover long distances with each stage, but this arrangement had to be abandoned very soon as it was necessary to cover greater stretches. So next day the vehicles of the formation, camouflaged in greenery, started off one after the other with a space in between each, moving by light of day to one point

of cover and then on to the next. As was to be expected, the pace was slowed down considerably and losses were incurred through the activity of low-flying enemy planes. The movement had to be carried out along a single path of retreat, as the territory north of the road was in the hands of the Maquis, who would have found it easy to deal with each loaded vehicle individually. So the Division moved along this road in mixed groups, each able to look after themselves. The lack of the 277 Army Anti-aircraft Battalion's guns was felt very keenly, particularly when crossing the Rhone.

2. That same day the G 3 of the Division reported to General Wiese, Commander in Chief of the 19 Army at the latter's headquarters and was given the order for acceleration of the tempo of the march. In the opinion of the Army a landing by the Allies was to be expected hourly. So the Division was to keep as near the river bank as possible and to be prepared for a quick crossing of the stream with the aid of the few bridges still passable.

From 14 Aug its command post was located at Remoulins, some 25 kms west of Avignon. The next day, the landing of the enemy in the sector of St. Tropez - St. Raphael took place. Heavy air-raids by his planes destroyed the remaining bridges across the Rhone between the Mediterranean

coast and Pont St. Esprit. So the Division, reaching the Rhone with its most forward elements on the evening of the 15, had to get its formations across the river by ferryboat after receiving the above order, so as to assemble as told to east of Avignon. Points at which to cross were assigned at certain times by the Army, which had also to transfer portions of the 198 and 338 I.D. to the other side from their sector west of the Rhone. Over and above the boats in use or under construction at Aramon and Tarascon the Division adapted a large coal lighter for the ferrying over of heavy loads such as tanks and heavy guns (weighing up to 80 tons) - which it found at Avignon. In addition, the bridges at Monfaucon, only lightly damaged, could be restored. Using these and crossing early at night so as to avoid letting the enemy know that they were not completely unusable, it was possible to get vehicles across weighing up to 5 tons such quicker than by ferry. At the end of seven days the Division was gathered with all its parts on the east bank of the river. Owing to constant air-raids on the ferrying points known to the enemy and the complete lack of anti-aircraft defense on our side, and to running into portions of the 198 and 338 I.D. at crossroads, and the frequent breakdown of the somewhat worn vehicles, it had been impossible to accomplish the movement in a shorter time. If the bridges had not been destroyed the

movement would have been completed five days earlier.

On 17 Aug the divisional command post was shifted to the neighborhood of St. Remy, north of Chaine des Alpes. And for securing the collection of the Division in its assembly area of Avignon - Chaine des Alpes - Cavillon - Carpentras portions of an armored infantry regiment were thrown forward by the Division into the line Etang de Barre - east of Zix-Peyrolles. Through contact with portions of the coastal divisions, who were engaged in fighting further forward, the Division received its first impression of what was going on, the successes scored by the enemy, and the fighting ability of our own troops fighting there.

Until the 18, the Division was busy with the organization of the transfer across the river of its own formations. Supply troops had to be integrated at an early stage, as stocks of fuel formed the main requirement if the Division was to be of use. After covering a distance of 400 or 500 kms, the Division stood immobile on the eastern bank of the Rhone, all fuel supplies - both of the troops and the supply detachments, had been exhausted. Supplies of gasoline were hurriedly fetched in tankers along the river from Lyons and Toulon shortly before the encirclement of the city. At this time as well as later on the absence of a supply organ of their own was keenly felt by the Army Group, and of supply columns by the

19 Army; during the entire campaign the 19 Army had to fetch all its own supplies from O.B. dumps, in many cases across great stretches, and the wide network of supply routes were packed with moving columns, - travelling only at night because of the danger from enemy planes. Bottlenecks, of course, occurred many times in the course of the movement, but they could always be dissolved in some way or another by makeshift means.

3. 18 Aug, 1944 - The 19 Army received its instructions on this date for the conduct of the battle in the valley of the Rhone. The Division made its survey of the situation on the basis of such instructions. The first battles fought are described hereafter.

a). At 10.00 hrs on this date orders were issued from the command post of the 19 Army at Avignon to the commanding officers of the different formations for the retreat from Southern France via the Rhone Valley of all troops there. The move back commenced on the evening of the 31 Aug. Leading the movement on the west bank of the river was the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps, the LXXV Army Corps was in control on the other bank. Seven lines of resistance were ordered for the rearward covering detachments, and the Heights above Avignon were to be reached by the 24 Aug.

The mission of the Division.

The 11 Pz Div, immediately subordinate to the Army - was to

bring up the rear and prevent a breakthrough by the enemy on Avignon in the neighborhood of Aix. It was to secure the moving body of troops against a successful pursuit by the enemy along the line of the valley of the Durance at Peyrolles - Nyons, in a general easterly direction. The 148 I.D. was to cover the eastern flank of the Army at the southern exits to the mountains, the 157 Reserve Mountain Division was to close the passes at Grenoble, and thus prevent a successful pursuit by the enemy against Lyons - (at a later date it transpired that the missions of the two divisions could not be fulfilled).

The Division's estimate of the situation.

b). During this time, the enemy was engaged in strengthening his bridgehead and in widening it locally. It could be reckoned that he would move forward in a very short time; he was bound to attempt to take the Rhone Valley directly or by advancing through the western exits to the Alps and then turning in westward. If things developed unfavorably for us it had to be taken into consideration that he might exert pressure frontally from the South and attempt to overtake and engulf our east flank during the retreat operation. In this case it would of necessity be the main mission of the Division to secure the eastern flank of the Army. Repulse of a frontal attack would be the main task of the infantry and the Division

understood quite clearly that for this assistance by tanks would then be required. Those divisions located in the coastal sectors, which were to be regarded merely as forming a security line, remained fixed in position in Marseilles and Toulon - (in the former the 244 and in the latter the 242 Divisions). Both divisions subordinated to the LXXXV Army Corps - the 198 and the 338 - had not brought all their detachments across the river; they were to some extent separated from their supply columns, not up to strength in artillery, did not have enough tank-smashing weapons, and in their composition and training not a coherent force. Their value, in a war of movement, was somewhat questionable.

The Divisional Commander had to depend on the fighting ability of his own men right from the start of the retreat, there was no use in expecting any assistance from the Luftwaffe. Great demands were therefore to be met. The size of the sectors to be defended and the double task of repelling enemy pursuit detachments and helping to throw back any frontal pressure exerted would of necessity lead to the forming of small fighting groups; in many cases the terrain favored such fighting. Together with this, the Division had to ensure that reserves were constantly available to resolve difficult situations or - if need be - to prevent encirclement by pursuing enemy troops, which might very easily happen. Such

a mission forced the troops and their officers to a realization of the fact that failure at any part might make it quite impossible to repair the damage done at another and might lead to the isolation of portions of the Army formations. And with regard to the danger on this point the Commander of the Division did not allow the officers under him to entertain any doubts.

The start of the battles.

After receipt of the orders from the Army the Division proceeded to strengthen the security line occupied up till then during the course of the 19 and 20 Aug by bringing forward one artillery battalion as well as by assigning a certain number of tanks to each combat group. North of the river Durance and its valley reconnaissance patrols were pushed forward between the Durance and the Eygues and they were to remain in the line ordered by the Army. The main body of the Division was held in the area of Cavallion and north thereof as a reserve force, so as to be ready to absorb the force of any breakthrough made by portions of the 7th American Army against Avignon.

Grouped in this wise, the first contact with armored reconnaissance patrols of the enemy took place about the 20 Aug east of Aix and at Reyrolles, i.e. - at the start of the retreat by the infantry formations.

But it soon began to appear to the Division that the main force of the enemy pressure was not being exerted in this spot, for had that been the case our own comparatively weak forces should not have been so successful in repelling it. This impression was confirmed on the 22 and 23 Aug by our own reconnaissance, which discovered that enemy motorized columns were pressing forward across the river Duranco northward at Forcalquier. So, if the enemy started to come after our retreating detachments he would not come up against any resistance from our side at the southern exits to the mountain passes, as the 148 I.D. had been withdrawn and despatched to Northern Italy.

So, taking into consideration the facts delineated above, all the forces we had available for the purpose were utilized to build up a security line north of the river Duranco, with its stronger parts at Apt, Sault, and Nyons. The Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, strengthened by the addition of some tanks and by one artillery battery was thrown forward through Montelimar, Loriol, and into the region of Crest, as soon as it had completed the crossing of the Rhone, on the 23 Aug. Here, the battalion was to prevent at all costs a push forward westward on the part of the enemy in the valley of the river Drôme. For - if they failed to do so our own supply lines would be snapped and it had to be remembered

that the motor fuel then on the way up would never be delivered. The Division also moved all portions not absolutely required for the fighting into the area north of Valence, - supply detachments and the Army Anti-aircraft Battalion, - still without any guns.

On 24 Aug the divisional command post was shifted into the area east of Montelimar. The 19 Army now ordered a hastening of the tempo of the march movement of the LXXXV Army Corps in view of the position with regard to the enemy, and the goals previously set for each day's march were cancelled. The Division requested and was granted permission to withdraw its forces from the southern front in order first of all to strengthen the security line to the East and second so as to be able to extract strong reserves.

That day passed without incident on the Durance Front between Avignon and Orgon and the armored infantry regiment there would be extracted from the line with the onset of darkness. It was utilized to relieve the forces standing in the Apt - Nyons sector, between Durance and Eygues.

Reconnaissance carried out on the eastern flank showed marching columns of troops in the vicinity of Sisteron moving northward, doubtless aiming for Grenoble. Their goal, however, could have been to attempt to cut off the 19 Army or portions of it by turning inward smartly from the region

of Gap westward along the line of the roads from Gap through Die - Livron - or alternatively - Gap - Serres - Nyons - Bellane. The rearward covering forces of the LXXXV Army Corps managed to get from where they were to the heights of Avignon by the middle of the night of 24 Aug. That same night the Division collected all the forces made free in the region east of Montelimar. Therewith, the two possibilities of encirclement, - actually threatening to develop - caused by a movement of the enemy through Crest to the Rhone and through Nyons to the river, were borne in mind.

4. 24 Aug. The battles between Montelimar and Valence.

The reconnaissance battalion reported on this date that contact had been made with enemy troops early that morning, moving from the neighborhood of Crest, in the valley of the Drome. The message came by radio and the strength of the enemy detachments was not given, but the view was expressed that from further south stronger forces were about to move from the Northeast southwest and westward on Montelimar and that others were in motion to the North. That same day our troops sustained some losses in brushes with the French civilian population, who asserted that they had made contact with the Americans.

In the evening the pressure of the enemy in the valley of the Drome strengthened against the reconnaissance battalion,

while enemy artillery made itself felt at Marsanne and Cleon. At this time the 19 Army ordered that the portions of the 198 I.D. just then coming up were to be subordinated to the Division. A clear path of retreat was to be secured the next day by an attack by our troops parallel to the Rhone Valley road, through Cleon and Roynac, - to Grane. This was very desirable, for the movement, constantly threatened by the enemy airforce - with both noncombat and fighting troops using the one and only road, was growing more and more difficult. (See Sketches '2' and '3').

After assembling the forces destined for the assault south of the Reubien river on both sides of St. Gervais the attack was launched about mid-day on the 25 Aug. Our artillery could only be used in piecemeal fashion, as the 198 I.D. subordinated, had not yet got its artillery up. A portion of the tank force was tied down on the immobile defense front of the Division with considerable infantry forces as well.

But the enemy artillery proved to be stronger than we had imagined, and the attack was a failure. It was to be tried again on the day following, when the LXXIV Army Corps had succeeded in bringing up further forces. The 198 I.D. was withdrawn from its subordinate position to the Division. And as the success of the attack the next day was far from certain, and since the pressure of the enemy was increasing,

constantly and was forcing the gradual withdrawal of the reconnaissance battalion the 11 Pz Div was to assemble sufficient forces so as to hold open at all costs the only road free to the North - the important pass on the heights east of the line of La Coucourde - Livron.

During the night of the 24 the main body of the Division was collected east of Montalimar. Considerable portions employed in the security sector to the East were freed at the same time, as the rearward covering force of the LXV Army Corps had to be taken back to the heights of Orange - Carpentras. On the 25 the situation was extremely tense. In the city of Montalimar the disquiet became more noticeable, traffic blocks began to pile up as the vehicles on the Rhone Road were coming back again. Very soon the sounds of battle were audible north of the town and showed that the enemy had succeeded in cutting the road at La Coucourde. A large section of the 19 Army was now in great danger, if the attempt to open a way were to fail. So the Divisional Commander resolved that the attack would be led by him personally, and with him at its head, the attacking force of tanks, - armored personnel carriers, and self-propelling guns managed to fight a way free. There was no time to be lost as the enemy forces were necessarily growing stronger hour by hour. An attempt by the enemy to carry out an attack from the East against the southern part of the long, scattered

village, with the aim of striking our own attacking forces at the side of their spearpoint, was repelled. The losses incurred during this battle, which lasted about four hours, were considerable, to which the spotter planes directing the enemy fire contributed in no small measure. In the village a band of men from the Todt Organization, railroad security troops, girls of the signal and communication sector, with motor vehicles piled with supplies, was very badly shot up.

By that evening the main heights - or at any rate the approaches thereto, at La Coucourde, were again in our hands, as well as those to the North. It is true that the enemy was still in possession of observation points dominating the road through the Rhone Valley but he could not exert any direct influence thereon.

During the night of 25 Aug the armored infantry regiment was relieved by an unarmored one, at La Coucourde and north of this place and was thrown forward, reinforced now by artillery and a group of ten tanks, to strengthen the armored reconnaissance battalion - across the river Drome into a position some 6 kms northeast of Livron. Sapper troops were employed at the Drome west of Loriel, where they rigged up a contraction to enable the vehicles to ford the river.

26 Aug. The defense front east of the line of La Coucourde - Loriel was now made stronger. Enemy pressure continued strong

against La Coucourde and it came to a tank battle during the night, in which the officer in charge of a tank company illuminated six enemy tanks with a Very pistol and enabled them to be knocked out. Replacements for night-firing gear which had been lost were brought up on this day. But our own losses in armored infantry were also so severe that the first replacements had to be called forward to make up the gaps in their ranks.

Under cover of a blocking unit of the LXXXV Army Corps, sent in south of Montelimar with their front to the South, the first elements of the infantry marched into the opening made, after the attack repeated on the day previous at St. Germain had again failed. La Coucourde, Saulce, and Loriel demanded their toll of lives, for it was here that the strength of the enemy artillery was concentrated. In addition, the fighter-bombers of the enemy now began to grow more active. We never saw a single plane of our own during the retreat through the Rhone Valley.

During the course of this same day the reconnaissance battalion was forced to retreat gradually as far the line of Grane - Alex in the Brome Valley and assemble its free portions and put its units in order, as they had become somewhat mixed up in the narrow mountain pass at La Coucourde; it gathered them all together in the aforementioned spot north of Livron.

It was ordered to undertake security duties in the direction of Allex and hold itself in readiness for the event of an enemy breakthrough near the battalion, to attack the northern flank of the enemy forces.

On the evening of the 26 Aug the waters of the river Drome began to rise, an inexplicable phenomenon considering how hot the weather was; this forced us to build auxiliary bridges hard east of the Rhone and these were ready by the early morning hours of the 28 Aug. The reserve regiment had been obliged to make an attack from Ambonil against Allex during the previous night as the forces of the reconnaissance battalion no longer sufficed to face up then to the constantly increasing strength of the enemy and the load had to be lifted to some extent from its shoulders, all the more as the enemy was now exerting pressure south of the Drome against Loriol. Heavy battles were fought. By this time the divisional command post was located west of Livron.

On 27 Aug the Army ordered the greatest speed in the movements of the LXXXV Army Corps which had had to march forward in the daytime as well through the pass of La Courcourde, - with very considerable losses, something which had to be put up with as it could not be avoided. The job of getting across the river caused very serious difficulty, but it was successful.

Livron and Loriol now lay under heavy enemy artillery fire. It was surprising how speedily the artillery crews adjusted their fire after receiving indications as to targets from their spotter planes.

During the course of the day the reconnaissance battalion was relieved of the mission it had had to discharge hitherto and was sent in as cover for the left wing of the Division in the neighborhood of Beaumont, some 12 kms southeast of Valence. It was to bar the roads along the Drome leading to Crest and carry out careful reconnaissance to the North, East, and North-east. It had a few brushes with enemy troops here, near Uple, but nothing more.

Owing to the difficulties of crossing the Drome, large forces were collecting on the southern bank of the river. The enemy pressed forward against Loriol and during the night hard local engagements were fought. Portions of the LXXXV Army Corps were supporting the detachments of the Division there; the situation became more stable....

The remaining portions of the regiment occupying the sector south of the river, now freed from duty there, were transferred to the other bank and employed to relieve the armored regiment which was occupying a position at Agbenil. The Divisional command post was now at Valence.

29 Aug. Our own reconnaissance, and news received from the

Army made it clear that the enemy had wrested Roan le Bourg from some units of ours. This meant a recurrence of the danger of encirclement; the pass at Tain was threatened, and at the same time one of the two crossings over the river Isere which would have to be used was threatened. This was a very unpleasant fact to have to face, as the bridge over the Rhone north of Valence was very open to attack by enemy planes and it would be very difficult to replace it with an auxiliary bridge if it were destroyed, owing to the steepness of the banks at that particular point.

An armored group, made as strong as possible - even at the expense of the actual front, carried out an assault on the town from the road along which the troops were moving and succeeded in taking it again. The threat to the Tain Pass was averted, but only for the time being.

From Lyons there came a report from the 377 Army Anti-aircraft Battalion that their guns had at last arrived and had been used to repel an attack by Free French troops; this news reached us by radio. Also, enemy counterattacks north of the river Drome in the vicinity of Arbois were repelled. Thereupon, the crossing of the river became an easier matter.

With the onset of darkness, the forward elements of the fighting detachments rolled through the Tain Pass; the city was still burning from attacks by enemy bombers a short

while previously, along with several railroad stations north of it. The first portions through the pass were sent in to secure the road leading from Grenoble to the Rhone, at Beurepaire. In a short time they had come into contact with enemy reconnaissance patrols.

The battles in the area east of Lyons - Bourg.

On 31 Aug the Division - as ordered - carried out security duties east of the road to Lyons along which the troops had to pass, leaving behind a rearward covering force for the purpose of keeping open the Tain Pass, stationing itself on the hill above Beurepaire - St. Laubert. Along this security line enemy reconnaissance detachments were thrown back during the course of that day. However, the enemy proceeded along the line of the security front with the main body of his troops against the Rhone crossings at and east of Lyons. Because of the pressure exerted by him the Division sent forward a combat group while it was still light through the city of Lyons to the northern bank of the river into the area of Bagneux - 15 kms northeast of Lyon. This combat group was to hold itself in readiness to attack south, east, or northward.

The Army Group 'G' had established a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhone, using anti-aircraft and alarm units, along the line of Vienne - La Verpilliere - Chavanoz, for

the purpose of absorbing the troop detachments; this bridgehead was strengthened with troops taken from the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps. In places our own division's detachments had contact with these units. North of Lyons the road to Dijon was to be secured by other units.

During the night of 30 Aug the last portions of the LXXXIV Army Corps marched through the Tain Pass. The Division's command post was moved to Vienne.

On 1 Sept strong enemy forces pressed forward from the Southeast against Lyons, and particularly against the Rhone crossings east of the city. We heard that enemy patrols had got as far as the Swiss frontier. Again the situation grew tense.

The LXXXIV Army Corps was funneled through the bridgehead at Lyons and set in motion northward along the river Saone toward Macon. The command was taken over by the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps.

The 11 Pz Div was to reach the northern bank of the Rhone so as to block the Rhone sector Lyons (exclusive) to Pont d'Ain (inclusive). In this way lateral protection of the forces marching off northward was to be assured. Detachments of troops were already standing at important points, so that the Division decided to reinforce these with more troops but to hold the main body of the Division in readiness for a

counterpush into the above-mentioned area. The reconnaissance battalion was employed in the area of Bourg en Bresse for securing the multiple road junction and to carry out reconnaissance on the open flank. In the late evening of 1 Sept the enemy contrived to form a bridgehead through Rhone and Ain, near Chazey, which we were only able to seal off with great difficulty. On 2 Sept the Commander of the Division sent the main body of the formation in the region there to smash the enemy's bridgehead. Fierce fighting developed, which in the depression formed by the river broke up into isolated tussles. The fire of the artillery on both sides could only be brought to bear in the late afternoon. Tanks took a hand in the battle, our troops gained a considerable amount of terrain but were not able to wipe out the enemy's bridgehead. (See Sketch '4'). Toward evening the fighting seemed to dissolve, apparently the enemy had perceived where our own main point of gravity lay and started to regroup his forces. At all events enemy pressure began to increase gradually on the left wing, at Pont d'Ain. In the night of 1 Sept the Division's command post was moved to Lyon-Nord. During the night following, the center of gravity of our defense was shifted northward and an armored combat group was placed at the ready south of Bourg en Bresse. The Ain-loop at St. Maurice was arranged for flexible defense, a more favorable

disposition than a main line of resistance along the bank of the river.

We had a successful day; the enemy was held in check here, even if the danger was not entirely averted. The next day would be sure to bring an enemy push through Pont d'Ain against Bourg. During this night the remaining portions were taken over the Rhone at Lyons. The infantry formations marched to the North, their next point of danger was bound to be from the area of Bourg and here - in fact - fighting developed which lasted several days. The Division's command post was now east of Bourg.

The enemy succeeded in crossing the river Ain at Pont d'Ain but his first push on Bourg was successfully absorbed by the armored fighting group there. From this meeting engagement fighting developed on a broad front; the enemy was bringing up reinforcements all the time, - the Division kept withdrawing superfluous portions from the former sector and brought them up through Villars-Bourg from the West. And in the face of the continuing enemy attacks south of Bourg a coherent defense front grew up toward the South. And as we were not supported on the flanks by any other troops lateral security was built up at Marlieux to the Southwest and at From to the East. The enemy kept up his attacks, his artillery caused us many casualties and forced us to move our

main line of resistance back a little every night in an attempt to diminish slightly the effect of his artillery fire.

In the valley of the Saone our infantry were able to march off in loose formation without being attacked. Their rearward cover was supposed to reach the hill above Bourg by about the 4 Sept, so that the multiple road junction at Bourg only needed to be held up till this date. The 4 of Sept, on which the main defense line was moved a little to the South of Bourg, brought with it a report which in the circumstances was not pleasant news..... Montrevel, 15 kms northwest of Bourg had been taken by a strong reconnaissance force of the enemy which had succeeded in going round our eastern flank unperceived. This brought into existence road blocks, such as called a halt to our entire supply traffic; the supply detachments at Montrevel had been unable to prevent this mishap, although they were still putting up a fight in the houses there. The armored reconnaissance battalion which we had at our disposal, strengthened by the addition of six tanks Type 'V', - one battery of artillery, and a sapper and engineering company moved to the attack out of Bourg an hour after receipt of the news of the taking of Montrevel. A hard battle developed which ended favorably for us, thanks to the assistance of our

artillery, as fortunately at the time the enemy had none of his own to support him. House-to-house fighting started, in which the tanks on our side did not get a chance to function effectively. The enemy's armored patrol cars, fighting very stubbornly - were only forced to move off to the East, - when we brought into play some close-fight anti-tank troops, against whom the tanks were unable to stand as they could not move in among the houses. Late in the afternoon the road was again clear but the situation remained vague. It was not until that night that the Division was able to throw forward troops to the multiple road junction.

On the evening of 4 Sept contact was established again with the LXXXV Army Corps in Macon - via Montrevel; it was able to continue its march undisturbed behind the Doubs.

The heavy aggressive and defensive fighting of the 11 Pz Div in the area east of Lyons - Bourg en Bresse between the 1 and 4 Sept allowed the infantry formations and the Wehrmacht detachments assigned some space for breathing. They got as far as the northern bank of the Doubs and the LXXXV Army Corps took over the defense sector of Chalons sur Saone - Bescon.

6. The fighting in the area of Besancon - Swiss frontier - Belfort.

In accordance with its mission, the Division - starting on the 4 Sept - moved off in retreat through Louhans - Seurre

- Dole, behind the Doubs, where the front of the LXIV Army Corps was being built up. Rearward covering forces on the southern edge of Bourg did not come into contact with the enemy to any particular extent. The march through the neighborhood of Besancon the first goal of the Division, proved particularly trying, owing to the activity of enemy strafing planes above the very narrow roads and lanes, and it was the same between there and Dole. Burnt-out vehicles of every conceivable type lay along the edge of the roads, detours around villages had to be made; only in the night-time could we continue our march. The river bridges at Dole lay under constant attack from the air but amazingly enough - in spite of the enemy's pattern bombing they remained comparatively intact during the time the Division had to cross. After pausing for a rest in the neighborhood of Dole the most forward elements of the Division arrived in Besancon early on the evening of 5 Sept. The divisional command post was now at Besancon-Nord. While here, the Division received an order from the Army to defend itself in the sector of Besancon - l'Isle sur le Doubs, exploiting the possibilities of the river for this, and also to carry out reconnaissance as far as the Swiss border. This meant that - in the sector, meant to be occupied by an armored division - and so the troops moving in could only man the most important positions

in it - at wide intervals. The intention was to build up a security line and assemble and hold ready the main body of the division for attack. So the first regimental group placed part of its detachments south of the southern rim of Besancon, as German troops south thereof, unknown to the Division - had announced that the enemy was moving forward there. While the front was being built up there came like a bolt from the blue the report that the enemy had taken Baume les Dames on 6 Sept from the South, our own troops were preventing him from getting further. A few tanks and one artillery battery were sent at once to aid them; infantry detachments would be sent along as soon as possible but in the meantime forces must be withdrawn from the supply detachments there. The troops sent were placed under the command of the Commander of the armored infantry battalion, who happened to be free for an assignment just then. The battle raged for long at this point, both sides knew the importance of gaining the road to Belfort...leading eventually to the Burgundy Door.

The individual details of the fight could not be kept check of by the Division; its full attention was directed to the neighborhood of Besancon, where fighting started also during the course of the day. Here, the enemy had his artillery in place early on, so that it could not simply be

a matter of a reconnaissance push. This was fully taken into consideration when we were engaged in building up our front with the aid of the troop detachments arriving one after another, and when we were placing our tanks and artillery.

Toward evening, the fighting died down, and the road to Beaume was free. Whether the enemy was still present on the northern bank of the Doubs or not was not yet clear.

Control was now taken over by the IV Luftwaffe Field Corps in the sector on the right and the Staff of the LXXXIV Army Corps was extracted, for the purpose of assembling a covering force in the vicinity of Belfort for the task of keeping open the Burgundy Door - from local units.

On 6 Sept the fighting continued directly south of Besancon, while things remained quiet at Beaume. The Division sent fighting reconnaissance groups forward toward the Swiss frontier to the Southeast.....reinforced companies pushed forward from the Doubs in accord with the system of roads lying at the disposal of the enemy for a march forward parallel with the Swiss frontier in a northeasterly direction, and moved toward the network of highways at Pierrefontaine - Belleherbe, and St Hippolyte. We had reason to believe that some permanent units of our own were still there. Contact was made several times with the enemy, and no troops of our could be discovered. From the reports received it appeared to the Division that the enemy was proceeding along the

frontier and did not, therefore, intent to turn inward immediately against the Doubs.

The fighting around Besancon was constantly increasing in violence and the regiment belonging to the Division employed at that point, with a battalion from another division still subordinated to it, was obliged to withdraw gradually to the southern bank of the river. That evening the enemy achieved a local breakthrough. The second reinforced regimental group had moved during the day through Besancon into the neighborhood of Beaume - l'Isle sur le Doubs. The divisional command post was moved behind the center of the sector north of Beaume les Dames.

That even the Division received the order from the 19 Army High Command to relieve the troops employed in the right sector at Besancon and replace them with the 159 Reserve Division. The sector still remaining was to be widened from l'Isle sur le Doubs on the left as far as the Swiss frontier.

Regrouping very soon started, and the operation lasted until the morning hours. The troops relieved started forward immediately on orders from the Division and moved to take over the sector from l'Isle - Blamont up to the Swiss border. The regimental group was to occupy with portions of its units an advanced position in the new sector on the left wing, at St. Hippolyte. The important pass there was easy to block.

The next day brought a clarification of the impression that the enemy was pushing forward along the Swiss frontier, and St. Hippolyte began to acquire great significance as a crossroads. The main body of the wheeled vehicles, an artillery battalion, and some sapper and engineering troops were assigned to the group, which now sent out a small combat group ahead which had just become free.

The enemy beat us to it, and north of the important point of Font de Roide a meeting engagement took place. At the last moment an alarm unit sent in there, and which had only been able to halt the enemy temporarily, received some support and the crossroads with Pont de Roide remained in our hands. On either side of the keypoint a firm defense line was to be built up immediately adjoining.

On the Doubs front within the divisional sector there were no engagements with the enemy of any particular significance whereas our neighbor on the right was in a critical situation. The Division's command post was now at Montbelliard.

During the five days between 10 and 15 Sept, the defense front was organized, built up, and reinforced, along the line of Clerval - l'Isle - Goux - Pont de Roide - Blamont. Our neighbor on the right relieved us as far as Clerval.

After the fall of Besancon the enemy - as expected - exerted pressure along the road Besancon - Beaume - Clerval -

l'Isle. Our neighbor on the right, together with those troops employed in Besancon, moved off to the heights north of the city. Under this kind of cover the retreat of the troops still in the Dijon area was to be conducted as far as Vesoul. Our armored reconnaissance battalion was utilized to maintain contact thus far. Clerval, held for several days as an advanced position, had finally to be given up in the course of the fighting which took place. Thereafter, l'Isle sur le Doubs and Pont de Roide became the two pressure points at which our own defense center of gravity was built. In between these two points portions of the Field Replacement Battalion and permanent units engaged there were inserted. Thus, the regiments were not actually tied down to the front, but could form their reserves within the compass of their own sector. On the right wing, in the vicinity of Rougemont, south of Villersexel, our right neighbor, the armored reconnaissance battalion was sent in corresponding with the trend of the retreat movement. Fighting gradually grew more violent, and when the enemy found that he could not break through at our stronger places, he went over to attack at other spots.

The valley of the Doubs divided the Division's sector at the time in two parts and so it formed two attacking groups with tanks and armored infantry - one to the North and the other to the South of the river. And - whenever this

became necessary - any one of these two groups could take a hand in the fighting, without having to cross over the only bridge at Montbelliard. And gradually our artillery forces were so grouped that they could be used once again in a coherent way. Sapper and engineering troops felled trees across the roads and left only the two open which were required for supply and the retreat movement.

On 15 Sept the front - in the meantime built up fairly strongly - approximately along the line of Villersax 1 - l'Isle - Goux - Pont de Rolde south of Blamont. Its right wing was at Villersax 1, and its left one along the Swiss frontier. The troops in it were subordinated to the LXXIV Army Corps, with its command post at Belfort. That of the Division was located at Morvillars.

During this period, the Division had sustained about 1,500 casualties, had lost about four artillery pieces - equal to 10% of its artillery strength - and 30 tanks - representing about 40 % of its tank strength. The greatest cause of tank casualties was the steepness of the roads in that neighborhood and the too-great strain on the tank engines.

The tanks had covered a distance of about 1,500 kilometers on steep and hilly roads although their scheduled coverage was only about 800 kms.

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During the entire period referred to our signal communications had functioned faultlessly. In spite of the fact that they had constantly to be on the move we were able to maintain telephonic communication almost the whole of the time with all detachments, by a clever use of the postal network mostly. In the case of our radio connections, it very often happened that daylight fading occurred, in the hilly and overhanging terrain.

Summary

a). I have written of the devastating effect of the enemy bombs on the river bridges across the Rhone. The enemy fighter-bombers disturbed the movement constantly - but above all our supply lines. They did not take so vital a part in the fighting of the enemy during the retreat, owing to the fact that our front line changed so frequently.

The enemy artillery very quickly adjusted its fire to the proper ranges, and it exerted a strong influence on the fluidity of our movements; traffic blocks were of frequent occurrence as a result. The Maquis did their worst against our supply trains, our telephone lines - and our messenger service. Any time they came up against a closed unit, or found that we had the support of tanks, they quietly melted away. Thus, they only exerted a delaying influence on us. How far they functioned as saboteurs, spies, and enemy agents

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for the Americans I am unable to say.

The weather was beautiful and very warm the whole of the time. The uneven nature of the terrain favored the defenders more than it did the aggressors. Obstacles could be arranged and blockage carried out with fairly small forces, the enemy only gradually learned to counteract the influence of the latter.

b). The entire period was one of strain and stress for officers as well as men. The most critical moments were: - north of Montelimar, at La Coucourde, on the Drome, at Romans les Bourg as a result of the threat to the pass at Tain, -- the days in the area west and east of Lyons - Bourg en Bresse - Montrevel - Beaune les Dames and the start of the work of building up a defense front west of Belfort. These critical moments were occasioned - apart from the inherent nature of the fighting - by the clever tactics of the enemy and his conscious aim of interrupting the retreat movement of our troops in the Rhone valley and of snapping our supply lines by turning in westward, and his attempt to reach the Burgundy Door.

c). At the end of this retreat the Division was of the opinion that it had greatly assisted in the withdrawal from Southern France, and as the only tank formation subordinated to have fulfilled its soldierly duty in fair fight, contributing not

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a little to the difficult retreat operation which had to be carried out.

(Sgd.) von Wietersheim.

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