

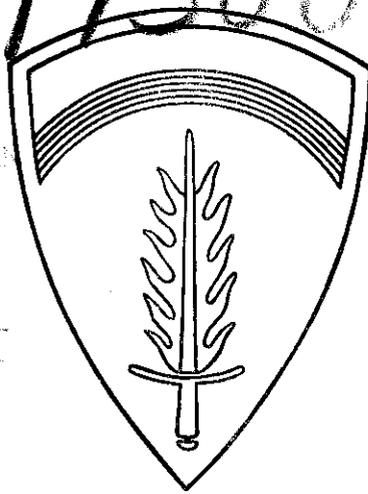
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BREST - 343^d INFANTRY DIVISION

(MAY 18 SEP 44)

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BREST - 343rd INFANTRY DIVISION

(May - 18 Sep 44)

By

Rudolf Kogard, Oberst i. G. a. D.

A. FROM THE INSTALLATION OF THE ATLANTIC WALL
TO THE BEGINNING OF THE INVASION.

1. Occupations in general.

In the world, there was talk of a strong German Atlantic Wall already at the time when same did not yet exist. It is true, the Atlantic Coast had constantly been occupied since the termination of the German-French war in 1940, but the fortifications were limited to merely a few important points.

In Brittany, the occupation forces were constantly changed; units which were intact were - at the middle of 1941 - sent to the East and replaced by troops from there, which were in need of freshening up. Their chief aim was the restoration of their full fighting strength, because they expected to be committed again in the East. Therefore, aside from training and recreation, they were - as may be easily understood - not very much interested in the development of the Atlantic Wall, especially since the majority of the troops did not expect an Allied invasion before the Fall of 1942.

Since, at that time, the German Army High Command had given up hope for a quick termination of the Russian campaign and hence, had to reckon with an Allied invasion in the West in due course, orders were issued in 1942 für the following essential changes in the defense system

of the Atlantic Wall:

a. A permanent occupation of the Atlantic Coast by units which were especially organized for this purpose - so called "garrison divisions",

b. a systematic improvement of the coast carried out by the garrisons,

c. increased effectiveness of operations on the part of the garrisons, by means of allotting supplementary weapons, according to the importance of the respective sectors. These weapons were manned by permanently stationed fortress cadre troops, who had to remain in the same localities, even when the security divisions were changed.

These measures brought it about that the garrison troops gained a good knowledge of the surroundings and became convinced that each improvement of the fortifications would result in a betterment of their own combat conditions.

When, at the end of 1942, the newly activated 343. Inf. Div. arrived at the northern coast of Brittany, in order to take over the sector of St. Brieuc up to Plouescat (west of Morlaix), it consisted of only two infantry regiments of three battalions each, four batteries, two engineer companies and one signal battalion. The armament and equipment was not complete; many troops still had no guns.

When the formation and training for defense of the Division had been completed and the Army High Command # 7 had realized that the occupation of the important harbor Brest would also have to be assigned to a permanent detachment of troops, the 343. I.D. was, during the middle of 1943, transferred and stationed in the sector of Plouescat (west of Morlaix) up to and including the Crozon Peninsula and reinforced by a third infantry regiment for this important task. Prospects were held out of the arrival of the third artillery battalion and the third engineer company.

It was generally assumed that the Allies would invade with the greatest commitment of men and material. We therefore had to prepare for this battle and were convinced that our weakness in material could be balanced by preparatory measures. Our troops knew that every dig of the spade and any progress made in training improved their chances for victory. The commands were issued and carried out in consideration of these facts.

2. Selection of the line of defense and technical construction.

We knew that the main body of the Allied invasion armies could only be brought up by way of the ocean. The enemy would have to be engaged in combat at points where his position was most disadvantageous, i.e. before

landing. Therefore, wherever landing conditions were favorable, we set up battle positions and determined the strength of the occupation troops, armament, technical construction and supply according to the importance of the respective locality. In view of the forces at our disposal and the frontage of the coast, it was possible only to occupy isolated points and to merely observe the intermediate terrain.

The technical construction was supposed to serve the following double purpose:

- a. Protecting our own occupation forces, armament and supplies against the effects of enemy fire,
- b. impeding the progress of the enemy by means of obstacles against landing craft as well as wire entanglements and mine fields against combat troops, and setting up of pole obstacles in areas which would be suitable for landing of parachute troops.

The change of occupation forces made it necessary to ensure the durability of the technical construction. Therefore, a construction officer - acting as chief of fortress staff - was permanently assigned to each division sector. The supreme control of the coastal fortifications remained in the hands of the permanent corps headquarters.

We assumed that landings would be made at high tide, because this would enable the landing craft to bring the

combat troops under cover as closely as possible up to our combat positions. Therefore, the obstacles against landing craft were set up at the highest tidal line. When, after Rommel's arrival in Brittany, it was pointed out that there was a possibility that the enemy might prefer to face our defensive fire on the longer way, rather than encounter our high tide obstacles, - we had to start erecting new obstacle lines for low tide landings which, in view of the lack of time and materiel, was possible only at few points.

The most distressing problem of technical construction was the impossibility of appropriate camouflage. In spite of our realization of its importance and greatest efforts, we did not succeed in sufficiently camouflaging the concrete shelter constructions and water obstacles against enemy air reconnaissance. We therefore had to assume that the enemy was fully informed about our fortifications.

The great lack of materiel had detrimental effects on the constructions. The most moderate monthly requirements of the coast defense sector of the 343. I.D. called for 40 trainloads of concrete, of which not even half the quantity was generally brought in. This was due - not so much to the lack of concrete - as the difficulties of railroad transportation, caused by Allied air force activity and acts of sabotage on the part of the French Resistance Movement. Allotments of concrete were made in accordance

with the importance of the respective fortifications. Until 1943, the three branches of the Wehrmacht were operating independently, so that these requirements were not sufficiently taken into consideration and it would happen that in naval constructions, latrines were fortified with concrete, while at the same time, defensive weapons at the coast could not yet be constructed with concrete. After the end of 1943, this state of affairs changed, when the corps general staff was placed in supreme control of the Wehrmacht branches.

The mine fields played an important role in the fortifications. They were supposed to be the chief means of making the gaps in our fortifications impassable. Gen. Felam. Rommel ordered the mining of an 800 meter wide coastal strip on the average. As the available mines were not sufficient for these wide areas, we established dummy mine fields, i.e. we simply fenced in an area and put up danger notices. This was done with the plan of actually laying the mines subsequently. Of course, many a unit interpreted this method erroneously and good-naturedly - without any thought of betrayal - temporarily allowed the population to lead their cows to pasture there. The dummy mine fields also influenced the obtaining of seaweed to a considerable degree. The German Army Command was depended on this material, but the extensive dummy mine fields eliminated large areas which could have been used

for the production of seaweed.

The coast defense and technical construction was hindered by the sanding up, which affected mainly the weapons and water obstacles.

3. Armament.

Already at the time when the field divisions - which, in comparison with the garrison divisions, were better armed - were stationed at the coast, it was obvious that the authorized armament was not sufficient for the coast defense. Therefore, the strong points and pockets of resistance were - in accordance with their respective importance - allotted supplementary local weapons (antitank guns and machine guns), which were manned by specially trained personnel: fortress cadre troops. These troops were - for tactical purposes - subordinated to the garrison divisions and remained with their weapons even when the occupation troops were changed. The 343. I.D. had in its sector one fortress cadre battalion with seven companies, consisting of roughly 2000 men. Although the idea of the supplementary local weapons was good, it entailed a great disadvantage, inasmuch as these weapons - due to the generally known materiel shortage - could be allotted only by degrees. In this manner, small caliber antitank guns, which were most easily obtained, were first put at the best landing points and emplaced in concrete. When, in the course of time, it became possible to allot medium antitank guns

and - shortly before the invasion - even large caliber antitank guns - to the sectors, it was longer possible to change the small caliber antitank guns for these, because the concrete constructions were too small and the best defensive points were blocked up. Due to the shortage of concrete and the lack of time, it was not possible to raze the concrete bunkers, especially, since the enemy invasion had to be expected at any moment. This resulted in a patchwork, which prevented the best possible effectiveness of our weapons.

4. Communications.

It was of the utmost importance for the command to be correctly informed by quickest means regarding all enemy actions. Every soldier knew that this was the only way to achieve the right kind of command, which would thus help him too. "The first report about the enemy attack is the most important!" This idea was hammered into all troops. Such reports had to be made by safe means, without weakening the occupation forces by sending out runners. We did not count on tube connections (telephone) during combat; therefore, the construction of underground cables was already started early. These measured from 1/2 to 2 meters, according to the distance from the main line of resistance and the importance of the locality. The cable construction was detrimental, inasmuch as the enemy - through air reconnaissance - discovered the connections of our defensive

system; camouflaging was impossible. The effects of the underground cable network were also harmful due to the frequent changes of the sector boundaries, inasmuch as many command posts had to remain at unfavorable points.

Carrier pigeon service was established to the most important strong points.

5. Supply.

Since, in case of combat, we could not count on the bringing up of the necessary material, even the smallest fortifications were furnished supplies sufficient for several days of combat.

Ammunition, food, clothing, fuel and water were allotted in accordance with the importance of the fortification and the availability of material, and for security reasons, were stored, -and protected as much as possible against shell fragments, at several points. The harmful dampness made it necessary to constantly check and frequently shift these supplies.

6. Guiding principles for the conduct of battle.

Mindful of the fact that the ~~expected~~ enemy superiority in men and material would be felt especially during combat on the mainland, we knew that we had to do everything in our power to prevent an enemy landing. Such an invasion involves certain weak moments, and during such times we had to engage the enemy in combat.

The Allies had the advantage of choosing the time and place of landing, which gave them a powerful fire superiority. We had in our favor the improved positions and thorough knowledge of the terrain. Every soldier knew that his coast position allowed for combat conditions which were more favorable than could be expected at any other point. Therefore, the guiding principle was: "Fight to the finish in the coast positions; there is no flexible conduct of battle, such as in the East".

Each unit which was committed at the coast for defense operations, required its own reserves for counterattacks, which - due to the enemy air superiority - had to be placed in readiness as closely as possible to the front line; however, not so near as to be caught, at the same time, by enemy destruction fire. Therefore, the reserves were held in readiness in fortified switch and rear positions.

Should the enemy succeed in accomplishing a landing, it would be necessary to clear up the point of penetration within 24 hours the latest; a breakthrough had to be prevented at any cost.

At the beginning of the invasion, we would have to resign ourselves to the enemy superiority; after the third day, we expected the arrival of a large number of our air force in the endangered area.

Every unit and command headquarters placed in the rear

had to entrench itself and prepare for all contingencies in combat, in order to be able - in case of breakthrough attempts - to prolong their resistance, until the reserves, which would be brought up, would be in a position to clear up the enemy breakthrough. This resulted in a checkerboardlike system of fortifications, which was created to prevent a widening of the enemy breakthroughs.

Every unit placed at the coast also had to be ready to support neighboring units which were threatened; bicycles and motor vehicles were kept in readiness, to enable the units to render assistance more quickly.

Each unit and command headquarters had its own air observers and improvised alarm detachments in preparation against enemy air landings. Reports on air landings could thus be transmitted the quickest way possible. The alarm detachments received constant training.

7. Is an invasion expected? Where? When?

We were certain that an enemy invasion would take place, in spite of the opinions to the contrary frequently expressed to us by the French. These apparently originated from enemy propaganda which was supposed to make our troops careless. Therefore, already at the beginning of 1944, orders were issued that ideas of this sort, which lulled our troops into security, were to be attacked most vigorously. Among the many incorrect reports, the 343. I.D. - a few days before

the invasion - received one which stated that the Allied invasion in Normandy would begin on 4 June. Already from the beginning of 1944, the French resistance movement became increasingly discontent, because the Allies were procrastinating for such a long time, and among the population one could hear the opinion that the resistance movement would dissolve if the Allies did not begin their operations soon.

During a conference of the General Staff held at Pontivy about the end of April 1944, the following was announced:

An enemy invasion was definitely expected; the only question which remained was where and when. As regards the place, the following possibilities were given:

- a. Normandy
- b. the Channel
- c. Brittany
- d. south of Brittany

At that time, they also discussed the possibility that the invasion would take place at two of the above mentioned points simultaneously or successively. This idea must have influenced the Higher Command continuously, because at the end of July and in August, the commands still called for a seaward defense. Added to this was the fact that of the roughly 100 divisions which England had assembled at the beginning of the invasion, the commitment of only about 40 divisions was recognized at the end of July 1944.

Hence, the Higher Command still reckoned with a second, possibly stronger invasion force, while the Allies apparently planned for the employment in the direction of Germany of the divisions which were not yet committed.

8. Order of battle and combat efficiency of the troops.
at the end of May 1944.

The 343. I.D.	:	Commander - Gen. Lt. Rauch	
		I a - Oberst i.G. Kogard,	
		Oberst	Baumann (after 18 August)
		Major	Heitsch (after 25 August)
The 951. Grenadier-Rgt.			Oberst Baumann
The 952.	" " "		Oberst Foerster
The 998.	" " "		Oberstlt. Jaeger
		later -	Oberstlt. Schwind
Three to four Ostbataillone, whose numbers I no longer remember.			Major Snizarewski Hauptmann Fink I can't remember any other names.
Festungstammabteilung Brest			I do not recall the names
The 343. Artillery-Rgt.			Oberst Sermersheim
The 343. Pionier-Batl.			Hauptmann v. Straub
The 343. Nachrichten-Abtlg.			Major Roehsler
Supply Services			Major Aich
Auxiliary Volunteers			several hundred Italians and Frenchmen
Commander of the Brest Fortress			Oberst v.d. Mosel

When the 343. I. D. was organized at the end of 1942, troops were used which were not fully fit for combat (g.v.H. - garnisonsverwendungsfähig Heimat - fit for garrison duty in zone of interior) or belonged to older age classes; this was considered sufficient security for the Atlantic Wall. The physical condition of the troops improved noticeably, which made it possible - during the course of 1943 - to pick out troops which were sent to the Eastern theater of war. The first to be considered were those troops whose health had improved and the younger age classes; however, later on, those who in 1942 had been considered fit only for use in garrison divisions, were also included. In their stead, the Division received older troops and those who were less fit. This constant change resulted in a continuous deterioration of the fighting power; when the invasion began, only about one third of the troops assigned at the time of organization were still left in the Division. The heavy losses in the East brought it about that the requirements for the selection of officers were also lowered considerably; men who, in 1942, had been rejected as officer's candidates, had to be trained as officer's candidates in 1944.

The Division was made up of South Germans - 2/3 - (including Austrians) and North-Germans - 1/3. The quality of the men was good.

The fortress cadre troops were older men or those classified as less able; they were considered fit for defensive combat.

The fighting power of the Ostbataillone (battalions composed of men from East-European countries) was doubtful; and after their arrival at the end of 1943, they were rejected by German troops. However, the higher commands - calling attention to the scarcity of men - made great efforts on behalf of the military training of these battalions and their recognition by the German troops. Nevertheless, the Ostbataillone were employed only in emergencies and even then kept under careful observation. Whenever the commitment was temporary and brief or German troops were close by, these battalions made good.

The employment of the auxiliary volunteers for supply services, without weapons, proved to be useful.

Service in the coast defense entailed the great danger that the troops would become unaccustomed to combat, and careless. This drawback was obviated through special training and alternating employment. Furthermore, the troops, which were committed for coast defense, were alternately taken back into the reserves for six weeks and trained for offensive combat. However, due to the many types of employment changes, the Division succeeded in giving this kind of training to only six of the nine German battalions.

Especially important was the Divisions-Kampfschule Brignogan at the Goulvenbucht, to which the troops were sent in rotation and in which they received the highest grade of offensive training. Although there were similar courses of instruction at the Armee, they did not have sufficient training sites for the many divisions.

The troops were in general overloaded with these many duties, so that their time for recreation was considerably limited; this, consequently, affected the combat adversely. The construction of field fortifications especially occupied a great deal of their time; in addition, there was the constant guard duty, continuous training and the many detail duties.

We were convinced that we had taken all the necessary steps to balance the expected enemy superiority. The morale of the troops was good, even though a certain war-weariness, caused mainly by letters from home - became noticeable. The High Command tried to have the political leaders influence the troops; they travelled, by rotation, even to the smallest coast fortifications, in order to speak to the men.

The arrival of Gen. Feldm. Rommel in the Spring of 1944 was a tremendous inspiration. Most of the troops began to believe that an enemy invasion could no longer succeed. However, their spirit was dampened when Rommel's commands were received after his visit, calling for extensive

supplementary constructions, such as for instance, low tide obstacles, etc. The soldiers were of the opinion that it would not be possible to make the necessary improvements before the invasion began.

The morale of the troops was less favorably affected in the Spring of 1944 by the arrival of the commission which had been sent by the High Command to investigate the defense preparations. This commission consisted of high officers of the three Wehrmacht branches, and it was their task to reveal in direct reports to the Fuehrer the weaknesses of our defense and discover the means to overcome same. We all knew that this too would neither help us obtain the concrete which was lacking and for which we had been fighting hard for months, nor be able to prevent the railroad sabotage activities of the French resistance movement. This belief was justified, for not the slightest change took place on the basis of the visit of the commission.

9. Superior commands and neighboring units.

The 343. I.D. was - with the coast defense sector of Brest - subordinated to the XXV. Armeekorps, whose command post was at Pontivy (later at Lorient). At the time of occupation of the Brest sector, the AOK 7 was deliberating whether it would not be better for the Division to remain - as had previously been the case - under the command of the LXXIV. Armeekorps, whose command post was at Guingamp.

This seemed advisable because of the likelihood that an enemy attack on Brest might be launched from the northern coast of Brittany. On the other hand, the decisive reason for subordination to the XXV. Armeekorps was, first of all, the necessity for durability of the fortifications. Since, furthermore, the possibility existed that an enemy attack on Brest might be launched from the southwestern coast of Brittany, the coast defense sector remained - unchanged - under the command of the XXV. Armeekorps.

The commanding general of the XXV. Armeekorps was:

Gen. d. Art. Fahrmbacher,

The chief of staff: Oberst i.G. Bader.

B. THE BREAST FORTRESS.

Brest, which was the second largest French harbor was - as submarine base - just as important for the German strategy as it was for an Allied invasion, and it was, therefore, imperative that it should remain in our hands. The occupation forces and the fortifications had to conform to this need.

The most important precautionary measures were aimed at the defense against enemy raids, which were expected chiefly from land (air landings), but might also be launched from the sea. The security occupation assigned to Brest consisted of two infantry battalions, which had to be permanently stationed within the fortress.

Oberst von der Mosel was the fortress commander. He was responsible for the construction of fortifications, the organization of the defense and the conduct of battle.

Major enemy attacks on Brest were not expected to be launched from the sea, but by way of land, i.e. chiefly from the northern coast of Brittany. The landward front of the fortress was set up accordingly, and this connection, the following was taken into consideration:

1. We were not certain as to the strength of the forces available for the battle at the fortress; we could be sure only of the permanent occupation forces and auxiliary

formations. The deterioration of the situation at all fronts made it impossible for us to hope for any substantial increase in forces.

2. As the time of the enemy attack was not known, we had to be ready for defense at all time.

3. We had to reckon with materiel shortages and transportation difficulties.

For these reasons we could only decide on a narrow cordon of forts. Although the installations of the old French fortification in the center of the city were - from northeast to northwest - obsolete and a short distance from our submarine pen, this constituted a fair beginning. The course of this ring of forts can be seen in annex # 1 (original fortified area)

(see annex #1)

The chief disadvantage of the narrow ring, the possibility of enemy artillery fire on objects of strategic importance, was not a decisive factor, because the enemy air force was able to attack these targets in full measure. In order to make possible an intelligent utilization of the construction material, which was arriving in barely sufficient quantities, and to properly commit the occupation forces at our disposal, orders were issued to the effect that changes of the cordon of forts were subject to the approval of the AOK 7. In days to come, this command rejected requests for

extention, referring to disadvantages which would arise therefrom for the adjacent fortifications of Lorient and St. Nazaire.

The tip of the Espagnol Peninsula, which was located south of the city, in conjunction with the original old French fortifications, formed the closing link in the cordon of forts of the Brest Harbor.

The narrow cordon of forts entailed the following disadvantages, which could be eliminated only in August 1944, when the number of occupation forces was increased;

a. It was not possible to set up the many anti-aircraft gun emplacements within the fortifications, which would have ensured their best possible effectiveness, and

b. the enemy was able to bring his observers by air and his artillery on land up to within six km of the submarine pen.

The fortress was divided by the Penfeld river course into two defensive sectors, each of which had one reserve company. In order to support the weak occupation forces in case of combat, alarm detachments - composed of civilians from the German administrative offices (Labor Service etc.) were organized and trained.

C. WAR EVENTS FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE INVASION
TO THE DISBANDING OF THE COAST DEFENSE FORCES
i.e. FROM 6 JUNE TO 5 AUGUST 1944.

(see annex #2)

The distribution of troops in the coast defense sector of Brest, at the end of May, has been indicated in annex #2 (marked in red). The sector was roughly 200 km long and occupied by six German infantry battalions; they had to guard coast strips which were roughly 30 km long. The division reserve consisted of one German battalion and three Ostbataillone. The companies were responsible for the securing of the coast; each of them had 6 - 8 resistance pockets (smallest fortifications). Individual strong points (larger fortifications) were up to two platoons strong. Even the smallest unit had its own reserve.

Reserves of the higher command in the coast defense sector of Brest were:

The 353 I.D. and the 3. Fallschirm Jg. Div.

The 343. I.D. was authorized - in case of direct danger and disrupted communications - to place portions of both divisions under its command, subsequently informing the superior corps headquarters as quickly as possible. Besides, artillery portions of both divisions had been brought up to the coast for strengthening and prompt defensive actions

and - for tactical reasons - were subordinated to the 343. I.D.

At midnight on 5 June, heavy bombardement was audible at the division command post at Chateau Kerlezerien near Landerneau, at a distance of 20 - 30 km, and it was assumed that this was the beginning of the invasion. Upon inquiries at the coast defense groups and the Brest Fortress it was ascertained that it was a heavy air attack on the Brest-Sued Airdrome on the Crozon Peninsula and that no enemy forces were to be seen at the coastline of the 343. I.D. Soon thereafter, corps headquarters announced the beginning of the invasion in Normandy, with air landings and landings on the sea.

From that time on, we also expected enemy landings in Brittany. As the reserves of the higher command had been marched off in the direction of Normandy, the 343. I.D. was left to its own resources. We knew, however, that in case of an enemy invasion in our sector, we would receive reinforcements from other sectors.

(see annex #2)

During the course of June and July, additional troops were withdrawn from the division sector and sent to Normandy and besides, the coastal sector was extended to almost double its previous length - 370 km - as can be seen in annex #2 (marked in green). Our losses during the Normandy battles

were, by the end of July, so heavy that the important Brest sector was at that time without any coast defense forces and only coast guards were left there. Moreover, the Ostbataillone were also committed in the forward line. These drawbacks can be seen by glancing at annex #2 (compare red and green indications). However, we were all convinced that the holding of our sector would be useless, in case the Normandy front were to collapse. For this reason, whenever troops were detached for assistance, only those with offensive training and best equipment were chosen.

I can no longer remember the sequence and the date of these troop movements, but I am able to set forth the following in this connection:

Soon after the departure of the reserves of the higher command, the only German reserve battalion of the Division and one engineer company were started off in the direction of Normandy. Following this, the coast defense sector was gradually extended and two additional German battalions were given up to the neighbor to the South (the 265. I.D.). The extension of the front of the 343. I.D. and the 265. I.D. had become necessary due to the fact that the 275. I.D. had been pulled out of the coast defense formation of the XXV. Armeekorps; this Division was also sent to Normandy.

As a result of these shifts, the 343. I.D. became almost completely non-mobile. Apart from this, the rear

columns of the garrison divisions had been apportioned to such a limited extent that they were sufficient only for transportation of supplies. The bicycles, which had previously been allotted to the reserves, were also sent along with the troops to Normandy.

A few weeks after the departure of the higher command reserves, the 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div., which was in need of reconditioning, arrived in the division sector from the East. The artillery of this Division was already at full strength and was committed for reinforcement at the coast in the Goulven area. Other portions of this Division were - according to orders of the Supreme Command - not allowed to be committed, unless they were up to full strength. However, already at the end of July, additional reinforcements were required in Normandy, and the 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div., which had in the meantime been replenished to some degree, was detached there. However, this movement - due to Allied air supremacy - could not be carried out, and the Division was ordered to the Brest Fortress for reinforcement.

It was generally known that the Allied air force at that time made troop movements impossible during the day. Such movements could be carried out only at night, off the main lines of communication, and it took foot troops seven full days to get from Brittany to Normandy. In this connection, the following difficulties had to be faced:

Scarcity of guides who knew the terrain, troubles while transferring the loads from broken down vehicles and camouflaging against air observation during the day. Smaller groups and individual vehicles, which had strayed, became lost.

At the end of July, the 343. I.D. realized that, in case of a westward enemy advance, the troops stationed in western Brittany would have to withdraw to the Brest Fortress, in order to escape capture. However, at that time, the purport of the orders issued by the Supreme Command was still the following: "Every fortified position is to be held and any joining of forces for united combat is out of the question". The idea of combined operations in the fortress was mentioned only a few days before 5 August by the corps general staff of the XXV. Armeekorps.

The 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div. was subordinated to the 343. I.D. and, after the breakthrough at Avranches, received orders to delay the westward advance of the enemy from the area of Landerneau - Monts d'Arree in such a manner as to make it possible to carry out the preparatory measures which had become necessary in Brest - especially the transfer of important defensive weapons from the coast. The Fallschirm Jgr.Div. was instructed, however, to evade any major engagements, which would considerably lessen its striking power; in that way, a weakening of the

fortress garrison was to be avoided.

The Fallschirm Jg. Rgt., which was under the command of Oberst Pieczonka, occupied the area around Huelgoat, southeast of the Monts d'Arree and during the first days in August, reported that enemy forces were approaching from the East. Soon thereafter, the 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div. proposed the withdrawal of the regiment, because otherwise, it might be encircled. The 343. I.D. rejected this proposal, pointing out that the preparatory measures in Brest were still in the process of formation. Twelve hours later, the complete encirclement of the regiment was reported. Thereupon, the 343. I.D. commanded that the regiment was to fight its way through to Brest. However, already the next day - about 4 August - it was reported that the enemy had withdrawn from Huelgoat, and during the last 24 hours, the strong sound of motors could be heard almost continuously. It was found out the next day that the enemy armored group had undertaken the encirclement of the Fallschirm Jg. Rgt. only in order to be able to reach the Brest Fortress quickly and without interference, in which it was completely successful. The Fallschirm Jg. Div. had not been able to fulfill its mission; this could have been achieved only through reconnaissance in force. The 343. I.D. also failed to receive the required reports on the strength of the enemy, with specifications as to dates and localities.

On 5 August, enemy armored forces reached the area around Lesneven, where they overpowered our weak occupation forces. This was the warning sign for the 343. I.D. that the withdrawal to the fortress of the coast defense forces should begin.

The movements of the Allied armored forces through Brittany proceeded unhindered and were aided by the following:

- a. Absolute air supremacy of the Allies, there was no sign of any German planes,
- b. the small number of German troops was stationed at the coast so that in the rear area, there were only supply services and few command posts,
- c. the help of Frenchmen as reliable guides, who were not only acquainted with side roads but also the positions of the German command headquarters, which were bypassed,
- d. the absence of any kind of sabotage action, due to the fact that this was a country friendly to the Allies.

When, on 3 August, the enemy armored spearheads approached the city of Pontivy, the corps general staff transferred its command post from there to Lorient. This happened so suddenly that communications with the 343. I.D. and 266 I.D. were disrupted for quite a while. On the basis

of numerous reports, the 343. I.D. concluded that the situation at the division adjacent to the right was untenable and advised same accordingly. However, since communications to corps headquarters had not yet been established, it was not possible, for the time being, to make any dispositions. When, later on, communications from corps headquarters were in order, the 343. I.D. reported the situation at the 266. I.D. and proposed its withdrawal to the Brest Fortress. The corps general staff agreed to this and subordinated the 266. I.D. to the 343. I.D. The 266. I.D. was ordered by the 343. I.D. to start off in the direction of Brest. When - after blasting of the permanent weapons, fortifications and harbor installations - the coast defense forces were set in motion, a message was received from the AOK 7, which was a vehement protest against this withdrawal and referred to the Fuehrer Command which called for: "Unconditional holding to the last of even the smallest fortification". At the same time, the AOK 7 reproached the 343. I.D. for seeing ghosts and asserted that in all of Brittany there were few enemy forces. The AOK 7 promised that, in case of deterioration of the situation, they would inform the divisions in time and issue the necessary commands. They insisted on an immediate re-establishment of the previous situation at the coast. The latter, however, was - in view of the demolitions - no longer possible; the high command was

especially horrified because of the blasting of the heavy railway artillery battery at Paimpol.

The 343. I.D. transmitted this order to the 266. I.D., whose troops were ordered to return to the abandoned positions. In this critical situation, there was nobody who was willing to take the responsibility for the withdrawal - which had become urgently necessary - of the 266. I.D., which fact, as will be shown later, resulted in the capture of the largest portion of this Division.

The corps general staff of the XXV. Armeekorps had - already during the first days in August - asked the 343. I.D. to consider the question how the defense of the Brest Fortress could be reinforced in the event of a withdrawal of the troops from the coast. In this connection, first of all the best weapons - especially antitank guns - with appropriate ammunition, were to be immediately sent off to the fortress. The disbanding of the coast defense forces was to be prepared in such a manner that it would be possible to set the troops going on short notice.

Because of the many transfers of troops to Normandy and the neighboring sectors, the 343. I.D. had only few serviceable vehicles and the horses of two batteries, some of which were afflicted with lung trouble. Therefore, it was no longer possible to count on being able to manage

large-scale transportation.

When, on 5 August, the enemy armored troops had reached Brest, a reinforcement of the Brest security occupation became an urgent necessity. Therefore, the 343. I.D. again approached the corps general staff regarding the withdrawal of the 266. I.D., which proposal was approved. Since this movement required protection, it was arranged that the troops use the road along the coast which was still occupied by the 343. I.D. However, when, in the evening, enemy tanks appeared at Lesneven and the withdrawal of the coast defense forces of the 343. I.D. had to be ordered that same night, the 266. I.D. was warned against taking the coastal road which had been agreed upon; instead, it was recommended to use as march route the road extending from Landivisiau over Landerneau to Brest. The 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div. was assigned to protect this movement in the area of Landerneau - Landivisiau. Unfortunately, the 266. I.D. was no longer able to comply with this warning - allegedly because of the fact that orders had already been issued - which led to the capture of the largest portion of the Division north of Brest. The division commander, General Spang, was also captured on 6 August; only small units managed to get through to the Fortress, some arriving there on 7 August and some on 8 August.

In the preparatory orders of the 343. I.D. regarding

the transfer of its coast defense forces to the Brest Fortress, it had - already on 3 August - been stipulated that the well fortified strong points of Aber-Wrach and Aber-Benoit would - for the protection of the harbors there - have to remain occupied, even in the event of the withdrawal of the coast defense forces. These commands were, at first, informative in character and in conformity with the critical situation. In this connection, we assumed that the movements had to be ordered and carried out speedily.

After 5 August, enemy pressure in the Northeast of Brest increased noticeably, while in the area between Landerneau and Quimper, there was as yet no sign of any enemy troops. As the danger existed that the enemy might block the road for the troops marching from the coast to the fortress, the march was ordered to take place on the night of 5 August. That same night, the Div. Stab 343 arrived at Brest from Landerneau. The 2. Fallschirm Jg.Div. received orders to also move off - after covering of the 266. I.D. - in the direction of Brest and to use the line of march south of the Blorn.

The movements ordered for the disbanding of the coast defense forces can be seen from annex #3. In this connection, the area around Plabennec, north of Brest, was avoided because it was occupied by enemy armored forces.

The order for this movement did not yet include any instructions with regard to the fortress, because due to the critical situation, it was not possible to count on the arrival of all troops in Brest. General Ramke was appointed commander of the outpost troops. The garrisons for the Armorique (Daoulas) Peninsula and Crozon were decided upon.

- D. WAR EVENTS FROM THE TIME THE COAST DEFENSE FORCES WERE DISBANDED UP TO THE CAPITULATION OF BREST, i. e. FROM 6 AUGUST TO 18 SEPTEMBER 1944.

(see annex #1)

As the Fortress of Brest became fully garrisoned, all the security forces at the northern and northwestern coast of Brittany were disbanded, so that these coasts were completely open to the Allied landings. This situation had arisen, because the two important strong points of Aber-Wrach and Aber-Benoit had been abandoned in error by the occupation forces, after blasting of the harbor installations and permanently emplaced weapons; there was also no coast guard there. The coast defense establishments in the area of Le Conquet and on the Crozon Peninsula - in accordance with annex #1 - belonged to the fortified area of Brest and served to protect the permanently emplaced heavy naval batteries southeast of Le Conquet and at Camaret.

The occupation of the fortress was accomplished during the period from 5 to 9 August and was - only at the northern front line - carried out under enemy pressure. The troops stationed in the South (the Quimper sector) had contact only with forces of the French resistance movement.

When the corps general staff of the XXV. Armeekorps gave orders for the disbanding of the coast defense forces, they also issued instructions to keep open the march route of Quimperle - Quimper - Chateaulin - Brest, which, however, was no longer possible, as far as the resistance movement was concerned. Therefore, on 7 August, the commanding general had to abandon his plan to get from Lorient to Brest. Following this, the commander of the 343. I.D. was granted Wehrmacht authority, which lasted until about 13 August, on which day the commander of the 2. Fallschirm Jg. Div. was promoted and appointed commandant of the fortified of Brest. Oberst Von der Mosel, the former commandant of the Brest Fortress, was assigned to be his chief of staff. This change had unfavorable effects on the defense, because the new commandant was not sufficiently acquainted with the fortifications.

As a result of the substantial increase in occupation forces, it was possible to extend the cordon of forts, so that the drawbacks of the narrow cordon of forts - which have been described in chapter B - were removed for the most part. Nevertheless, it was not possible to include all battery positions and the Brest-Nord Airdrome, because this would have resulted in an unfavorable course of the line of battle. Several antiaircraft batteries were, thereby, exposed to simple enemy attacks; the limited number

of personnel made it impossible - in spite of their fortifications - to offer any prolonged resistance.

Beginning 6 August, the enemy - advancing towards Brest from the North - felt his way forward, and, as he encountered resistance, sent parlementaires to the fortress commandant with the request to surrender the fortress, in order to avoid futile battles. This request was rejected; however, for humane reasons, it was proposed that the civilian population be evacuated and that only the Frenchmen working in Wehrmacht factories - and if necessary, also their families - should remain in Brest. The evacuation was arranged and proved to be a wise move, because most of the population would have been killed during the air bombardments which went on for weeks.

After General Ramke had assumed command of the fortress, he ordered the transfer of the Div. Stab 343 from Brest to the Crozon Peninsula, with command area extending south of the Blorn. On 15 August, the staff travelled on boats to Le Fret and on 18 August reached Morgat, where it remained until the end of August.

On the Armorique (Daoulas) Peninsula, the enemy - a few days after encircling the fortress - succeeded in taking the dominating Hill #154, - thereby overwhelming some portions of our occupation forces. Because of these successes, the large Blorn Bridge was threatened. Further

enemy attacks in this area did not take place until the second half of August. In order to clear up the situation on the Armorique Peninsula, the 343. I.D. little by little committed almost all of the German infantry units stationed on the Crozon Peninsula, so that eastern troops were almost the only remaining forces there. However, in spite of this commitment, it was impossible to hold the Armorique Peninsula; after its occupation, the enemy came up to within 6 km of the Brest submarine pen. Before the loss of the peninsula, the fortress commander ordered the blasting of the two large bridges across the Blorn and the Aulne (Terenez Bridge).

Towards the end of August, the enemy also began his attack on the Crozon Peninsula and - since German forces were lacking there - gained ground rapidly. Position after position had to be given up; for the protection of the artillery, protracted resistance was to be offered along the line extending from Brest-Sued Airdrome to Tal ar groas - (see annex #1 - covering position #1). In addition, emergency formations were organized out of staffs and rear services, and reinforced by antitank guns. These were also assigned antiaircraft guns, whose positions it had become necessary to give up, due to losses of terrain or enemy air attacks. Of course, supplying of the antiaircraft guns remained in the planning stage, because it was no longer possible to have the necessary concrete emplacements

finished in time.

In case of further enemy pressure on the Crozon Peninsula, orders called for occupation of the line of resistance extending from Anse de Dinan up to east of Quelern - (see annex #1 - covering position #2). This would still have made it possible to protect the heavy batteries on the peninsula. The positions were reconnoitered and labor service forces began construction of the line which was based on a system of strong points. On 1 September, the Div. Stab 343 moved from Morgat to the area north of Crozon; on 2 September, enemy bombers launched a heavy attack on Morgat, which was presumably aimed at the Div. Stab.

At the end of August, the forces of the far-off strong point of Audierne (south of the Douarnenez Bay) were to be disbanded and the occupation troops with armament were to be transported to Crozon. Although it was possible - with the aid of the navy - to establish contact, this attracted the attention of the French resistance forces, and the subsequent relief attempt was prevented.

At the end of August, enemy artillery which was deployed for action on the Armorique (Douglas) Peninsula, started systematic shelling of the Espagnol Peninsula, on which movements were handicapped by the lively enemy aerial surveillance. During the course of the first half of

September, it was impossible for any movements to take place in this area during the day, because of the heavy losses in men and materiel. In the area of the Brest Fortress, there was - since the encirclement - no sign of any German flier, in spite of previous promises, which made an especially unfortunate impression on the troops.

On 2 September, the enemy air force made a heavy attack on the old French Fort Quelern - which had been contemplated as the new post of the division staff - and destroyed the installations there almost as far as the boundary.

On the Crozon Peninsula, enemy pressure abated somewhat at the beginning of September, which made it possible for us to improve our rear positions. It had been planned to take the last stand north of Crozon in the old French fortification of Quelern, which protected the Espagnol Peninsula towards the South - (see annex #1 - covering position #3). Of course, the heavy artillery of Camaret as well as the rest of the artillery belonging to the Division was, thereby, given up, and only a few antitank guns remained for the antitank defense. These were of the utmost importance for the defense, because - judging from previous experiences - it had never been possible to hold any positions without their protection. On the basis of this realization, the Division - since weeks - had a special Panzer officer in the staff (Ia/Pak), who was

responsible to provide for replacements in case of breakdowns. This arrangement had the best results.

On 15 September, the commander of the Brest Fortress arrived at the Crozon Peninsula and reported that supplies were coming to an end in the fortress and that enemy flame throwers had worked their way up to within 200 meters of the bunker containing serious casualties. He stated that resistance in Brest was, therefore, becoming useless and that combat would cease in 2 - 3 days. Until that time, the 343. I.D. would have fulfilled its task of keeping the enemy as long as possible off the Crozon Peninsula in the direction of Brest. At this point I must not fail to mention that the 343. I.D. was, at that time, composed of only three weakened Ostbataillone, two batteries and a few small staffs.

At the middle of September, the enemy continued his attacks on the Crozon Peninsula. The fortress commandant had brought 1 1/2 companies from the fortress to the Espagnol Peninsula and had committed same for the occupation of the oblique defense line at Quelern. In this way, the remnants of the 343. I.D. were pushed to the southern part of the peninsula, in the direction of Cap de la Chevre - a region, which originally was supposed to remain free from combat and had been assigned to evacuees from Brest. On 16 September, enemy pressure on the weak eastern troops on Crozon increased to such a degree that the division

commander ordered the withdrawal of the troops to the area south thereof, already for the night of 16 September. During the night of 17 September, the resistance pockets in the new area were newly manned or reinforced, and the troops were ordered to follow the principle of "holding out to the last man". In this connection, no consideration was given to the grade of fitness, training and equipment. Thus it happened that in one resistance pocket, which was manned by twenty officers, most of them were sick naval officers who - unarmed and in peace-time uniforms - had been on their way to the convalescent home. In this pocket of resistance, there were two Belgian antitank guns which - in spite of the immediately imminent enemy armored attack - were still stationed on the beach and could not be fired in landward direction. All in all, confusion reigned during this last useless effort.

On 17 September, enemy armored forces captured the localities of Crozon and Morgat and on 18 September, advanced southward. They systematically mopped up our weakly occupied lines at the roads and the resistance pockets at the beach and towards evening, reached the last battery at the Cap de la Chevre, where the remnants of the Div. Stab 343 were captured. Thus, resistance on the Crozon Peninsula was confined to the Espagnol Peninsula. On 18 September, in the afternoon, when I was already a prisoner, I observed the moving up to positions of strong

enemy artillery forces in that direction and assume that this last point of resistance was overcome on 19 September the latest. The fortress commandant, General Ranke, was presumably also captured on that day, at the battery of Pointe des Capucins. With that, the battle for the Brest Fortress was finished.

As far as the center of the Brest Fortress (city area) is concerned, I am not in a position to give an estimate of the combat situation for the period after 15 August, because from that time on, I was on Crozon.

On the whole, it is of importance to report that the submarine pen remained in use until the beginning of September and the last submarines, going northward, left it about 3 September. Of course, we had lost our faith in the invulnerability of this structure already three weeks before, when the Allied air force, with eleven tons of bombs, had easily pierced the 6 1/2 m thick reinforced concrete roof. Of course, for the most part, the roof of the pen was only 3 1/2 m thick. The construction of the pen had deprived important installations of a great deal of concrete, so that we could not help but question whether this considerable expenditure of concrete had been worthwhile.

The ammunition supply in the fortress was adequate; during the first nights after the encirclement, supplementary close combat antitank weapons were dropped by planes.

There was a four weeks food supply for the garrison. The civilian population, with smaller rations, should have been supplied for the same length of time; however, in spite of greatest efforts, this could not be accomplished up to the time of encirclement. Roughly estimated, there were sufficient supplies for one week, whereby some articles were lacking, while on the other hand, there was more ample supply of others. The fortress held out from 5 August until 18 September, i.e. 6 1/2 weeks, which was made possible only through the evacuation of the civilian population and seizure of all civilian supplies.

There was no scarcity as far as other supplies for the fortress were concerned.

We did not hear of any epidemics on Crozon.

(signed) Dkfm. Rudolf Kogard

to Kogard Report

map scale 1 : 100 000
1 cm = 1 km

Fortified Area of Brest

Landerneau

2. Fallschjgr.

Div.

BrestBrest-Nord
Airdrome
Guipavas

Obstlt.

Fuerst

St. MathieuPlougastel-
Daoulas

Obst. Foerster

DaoulasBrest-Sued Airdrome
cover position #1
Gen. Rauch
Tal ar groasCrozonCommandant of the fortified area of Brest
General RankeLegend:Original fortified area. permanent fortifications
for the security garrison.Extended defensive area after the beginning of
August 1944 - on the Crozon Peninsula also cover
positions (cover positions #1, 2, and 3.)Submarine Pen in Brest (near the naval academy)When the fortress became fully garrisoned, only the following
reinforced strong points were to remain occupied in the former
defensive coastal sector of the 343. I.D.:

Aber Wrach, Aber Benoit, Audierne, Quessant Island.

map scale 1 : 250 000
1 cm = 2.5 kmWestern Brittany

Ile d' Quessant

Legend:

coast defense establishments at the end of May 1944

coast defense establishments at the end of July 1944

German infantry battalion) in comparison with the situation
Ost-Btl. (Russian volunteers)) in MayGerman infantry battalion) in comparison with the situation
Ost-Btl. (Russian volunteers)) in JulyReserves of the higher command (in the sector of the 343. I.D.) :
In May: The 353. Inf. Div. , the 3. Fallschjgr. Div.
In July: The 2. Fallschjgr. Div.Goulven 266. I.D.
266. I.D.Aber Wrach
Lannilis

Morlaix

Aber Benoit

Ploudalmezeau

Le Conquet

Brest

Daoulas

Hopital

le Faou 343. I.D.
(six infantry battalions
and four Ost-Btls.)

Crozon

265. I.D.

Aber

Douarnenez

Quimper

265 I.D.

Concarneau

map scale 1: 250 000
1 cm = 2.5 km

Occupation of the Brest Fortress
and disbanding of the coast defense forces.

1 Aber Wrach

2 Aber Benoit 266. I.D.

Ile d'Quessant Morlaix
3

Landivisiau

2. Fallschjgr. Div.
Landerneau

Le Conquet

Brest

Daoulas Monts d'Arree

Crozon

Donarnenez Black Mountains

St. P. Audierne

4

Legend:

Point of departure on 5 August 1944
German Inf. Batl.
Ost-Batl. (Russian volunteers)

Quimper
265. I.D.
Pont l'Abbe
Concarneau

Troop movements from 5 - 9 August 1944
indicated by arrows

At the coast, only the following strongpoints
were to remain occupied:

- 1 - Aber Wrach
- 2 - Aber Benoit
- 3 - Ile d'Quessant
- 4 - Audierne

