

tinued to pound the known German positions. 9 May, but no infantry attack followed.

ordered on a patrol to Artena at daybreak on 30 from the east with a combat patrol and capture e. The patrol went about 2 kilometers to the east e 2./,3./ and 4./Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung engineer platoon from the heavy-weapons compa-

The patrol crossed over the train embankment and reassembled in a deeply etched creek bed. This section of terrain led towards Artena, so they followed it until the bend in the Fossa River. Well concealed from view by crossing through a wheat field, the patrol reached a location some 400 meters northeast of the village.

Suddenly, enemy artillery began firing final protective fires and was then joined by mortars. When US forces began attacking with armor, *Oberleutnant* Bach ordered a withdrawal. It proceeded with difficulty, as the group was constantly fired upon by artillery. In Valmontone, *Oberleutnant* Bach reported back to the battalion commander, and *Major* Roßmann expressed his praise for the patrol's efforts.

The Allied infantry attacked on the morning of 31 May with their armor in the lead. *Kampfgruppe* Bach, consisting of 40 men, blocked the main road leading to Valmontone from the south. To a certain extent, it was fighting as a rearguard and seeking to deceive the enemy as to its true strength. *Oberleutnant* Bach constantly ordered his men to dig in to avoid the heavy artillery fire, even though their strength was nearly at its end.

Once the battalion staff had moved, at which time *Major* Roßmann was wounded, the rearguard followed behind. At the headquarters of *Panzer-Regiment "Hermann Göring,"* where *Oberleutnant* Bach had reported, *Oberst* von Heydebreck said: "Bach, without you, we would have never gotten out of here!"

Oberleutnant Sommer, the regimental adjutant, briefed the situation map to Bach in terms of the area of operations, the mission objectives and organization of the fighting forces. The high point of the briefing was the fact that the division had been able to prevent the collapse of the 14. *Armee* left wing in spite of the enemy's overwhelming superiority in weapons and men.

Oberst von Heydebreck gave responsibility for the orphaned battalion to *Oberleutnant* Bach. The 2./ and 4./Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung "Hermann Göring" commanders, *Leutnant* Wesch, who was reported missing on 25 May,

Oberleutnant Bach drove in the command car on the way to Palestrina, the location of the division headquarters. Once there, *Oberleutnant* Bach was greeted by the assistant intelligence officer, *Leutnant* Klein-Sextro, and led straight to the division commander, who was in a discussion with *Oberst* von Heydebreck, Commander of *Panzer-Regiment "Hermann Göring."* *Generalmajor* Schmalz also expressed his appreciation to the battalion and *Oberleutnant* Bach. As always, Schmalz was a picture of calm and composure. Bach relayed the following to the Author:

The most striking thing to me in this crisis situation was the Division Commander's friendly manner. Nothing frantic; no sign of nervousness! *Generalmajor* Schmalz truly remained above it all through his complete composure.

On the way back to Valmontone and his own battalion, *Oberleutnant* Bach was stopped along the way by a *Fallschirmjäger* officer, who warned him of the dangers of continuing on. He turned around and found the battalion radio network in Palestrina. The trains were located a little later; they were headed to Moricone, some 25 kilometers northeast of Rome.

The battalion's withdrawal led towards Rome via Mentana.

Oberleutnant Brandt was appointed acting commander for *Major* Roßmann on 2 June. His liaison officer was *Leutnant* Dr. Brandt. The battalion mission: "Deceive and weaken the enemy by fighting a delaying action in the current positions with the remaining forces available."

There were shots exchanged with some Italian civilians in Monte Sacro, a Roman suburb, during an ordered bridge demolition. The battalion engineer platoon under *Leutnant* Osterhaus was saved from a critical situation by an immediate counterattack.

The battalion then moved north towards Rieti during the night of 4/5 June. The German troops were on the road to defeat, and the Allied forces entered Rome. From 5 to 7 June the battalion moved along the *Via Nomenta* as far as Monte Rotondo and then along the *Via Salaria* towards Rieti.

On 4 June, the *Wehrmacht* Daily Report had announced: "In the heavy fighting in the area northwest of Valmontone, *Fallschirm-Panzer-Division 'Hermann Göring'* has performed heroically."

The withdrawal went from Rieti to Lake Trasimeno. The enemy only followed behind slowly in spite of having a major advantage in armor and air superiority. *Generalmajor* Schmalz led the division with an expert feel. As an experienced commander, he was able to weaken the enemy, stop him and always emerge from the fighting with his own skin, and the division's combat power, as intact as possible.

The command group moved to the Cervaro area on the Amiene River. *Generalmajor* Schmalz issued orders at the front to pull back behind the Amiene, where a new defensive line was to be established.

The division commander discussed the situation with *Oberstleutnant i.G.* von Bergengruen when he arrived at the new command post location at 1500 hours. When *General der Panzertruppe* Herr arrived, he approved all of the division's actions up to that point and gave his general approval for a withdrawal behind the Amiene. The division command post was moved to Mentana starting at 1800 hours on 3 June 1944.

The situation was stabilized when the 15. *Panzergrenadier-Division* was moved adjacent to the division's left wing on the evening of 4 June. The division was situated along the following line: Right wing on the Tiber (in the vicinity of the Rome Airport) — northern outskirts of Secro — Settecami — Lunghezza. The main concentration of forces was on the right wing. The remaining tanks were also directed there.

A corps order received in the afternoon of 4 June let the division pull back on the morning of 5 June to a defensive line from the Tiber via Monte Rotondo — Mentana — San Angelo. The enemy concentration both in and around Rome and its dalliance there gave the German command time to establish a new defensive front north of Rome.

The combat strength of the *Panzergrenadier* regiments, the reconnaissance battalion and the combat-engineer battalion was declining rapidly. The division's combat manpower had sunk to 977 men and was brought up to 3,124 men by 9 June 1944 through ruthless combing out of the trains and staffs, as well as the consolidation of several units. All the same, *Heeresgruppe C* had the temerity to comment on 18 June concerning the division's operations — despite "absolute praise for its combat performance" — that the division had sent an inordinate number of men and materiel back to the rear over the Apennines.

Generalmajor Schmalz responded on 22 June that not only had all demands for status reports been met, but that the trains in the Budrio area, by Bologna, had been moved because the *LXXXVI. Panzer-Korps* had expressly ordered him to do so. Apparently, a staff element was trying to conceal its failures by pinning blame on the division.

The further retreat from Rome through the Tiber Valley was physically very draining in the tropical heat of the summer. The US 5th Army pursued vigorously close behind and could only be stopped at Chiusi on 15 June. *Panzer-Regiment "Hermann Göring"* was on the defense there for some time, as well as at Lake Trasimeno.

Rearward movement went one step at a time. Positioned south of the Arno, the division was pulled out of the fray on 15 July and then packed off

to the Eastern Front in 72 transport trains. The Soviet Army had brought all of *Heeresgruppe Mitte* to collapse with its Operation *Bagration*, which opened on 22 June. The Red Army stormed through a gap several hundred kilometers wide to the west. That is why so many combat formations had to be pulled from other fronts and thrown into battle there. Among them was *Fallschirm-Panzer-Division "Hermann Göring."*

On 24 July 1944, the division started rolling over the Brenner Pass and through Innsbruck, Munich, Dresden, Breslau, Ostrowo-Litzmannstadt and Skiernewice to the vicinity of Warsaw, where it arrived three days later. The division would never again return to the Italian theater.

Before we close off this chapter on *Fallschirm-Panzer-Division "Hermann Göring,"* let us take a look at small-unit actions involving the 11. *Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 "Hermann Göring"* in the Chiusi area. The following was provided by the former headquarters section leader, *Fähnrich* Walter Stiewing.

The Fighting for Chiusi

The South African Regiment, The Cape Town Highlanders, was ordered on 21 June 1944 to capture and occupy the town of Chiusi which, according to reconnaissance reports, was only held by a weak rearguard of a few companies of a *Panzergrenadier* battalion belonging to *Fallschirm-Panzer-Division "Hermann Göring."* A Company under Major F. Bartlett was ordered to clear the town on 21 June 1944. The other three companies of his battalion were to support the action.

The first platoon under Lieutenant Wylie was in the lead. As it approached Chiusi towards 2300 hours, friendly artillery opened fire on the city. Shortly thereafter, the platoon encountered its first German resistance. A second platoon under Lieutenant E. P. Hardy was brought forward, but both platoons remained pinned down from mortar and artillery fire. They nonetheless managed to press forward into the city during a pause in the firing and reach the *Theatro Comunale* on the *Piazza*.

At around 0200 hours on 22 June, the regimental commander, Brigadier Furstenberg, ordered the battalion to push through rapidly. The Germans pulled back before A Company. D Company, echeloned to the right rear of A Company, encountered fierce German resistance and became pinned down. At 0300, when A company reached the *Theatro*, the company command set itself up in it and in an adjacent building belonging to a winery. However, both B and C Companies remained stalled as a result of strong German fire. Who were these German forces?

At about the same time the South African battalion was advancing on Chiusi, the 11. *Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 "Hermann Göring"* was occupying the hill north and northwest of the town. On 22 June, the order came down