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## Special Interrogation Report

# Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer

## Commander

### 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend"

(6 June - 25 August 1944)

*Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer remains a controversial figure in Canadian military history. As a commander of Waffen-SS troops in Normandy, he fought the Canadians in the days and weeks after the Allied landings and allegedly ordered the killing of prisoners of war. A Canadian military court at Aurich in occupied Germany tried and convicted Meyer on charges of war crimes. Although sentenced to death, Meyer received commutation to life imprisonment from the convening authority, Major-General Chris Vokes. Meyer was imprisoned in New Brunswick and West Germany until his release in 1954. Several significant political, legal, public opinion, diplomatic, and military factors worked together to turn Meyer into Canada's most notorious war criminal. His trial raised delicate issues of command responsibility for the first time, while Meyer and his formation, the 12th SS Panzer Division, became almost household names in some parts of Canada.*

*Some Canadians may have genuinely hated the man and his ideals, but Meyer garnered curiosity and respect for his abilities as a fighting officer. A combat veteran of campaigns in Poland, the West, the Balkans, and the Eastern Front, Meyer felt most comfortable at the front of his troops. The inclination was borne from years of experience in the reconnaissance role and a personal disregard for danger. Meyer was among the best-regarded silver foxes of the Waffen-SS, the*

*combat arm of Heinrich Himmler's Schutzstaffel. Meyer likely did not believe that he would survive the war; this fact may have played some part in his complicity in the killing of Canadian prisoners of war behind the lines. Winning the battle or to die trying in a heroic fashion was always his first concern. After being captured alive, Meyer became the subject of several interrogations to further investigations for his eventual war crimes prosecution and to assess Canadian and German battlefield performance during the Normandy campaign.*

*The following document gives good insights into Meyer's background, his unwavering adherence to the Nazi cause, the obvious pride in his formation's conduct, and the tactical battles against the Canadians in Normandy. This interview was conducted by the G Intelligence officer at the HQ of Canadian Forces in the Netherlands on 24 August 1945. In terms of operational details on the battlefield, Meyer demonstrated a remarkable memory, which proved less forthcoming on other matters during his war crimes trial. Meyer obviously inflated his own role and that of the troops under his command in operations. Canadian interrogators, on the other hand, added their own analysis of Meyer's claims. While furnishing an important perspective from the enemy's side, this interrogation report must be used with the standard checks for bias and reliability in any primary source.*

Editors

## Divisional Command

1. Kurt Meyer, commander of 12th SS Panzer "Hitler Jugend," at the age of 35 is the youngest German divisional commander. In 1933, he became a member of Hitler's body guard and all his subsequent service has been with the SS. In 1939, he fought in the Polish Campaign with the Adolf Hitler Division and subsequently in Holland and France. As regimental commander, he took a leading part in the campaign in Greece, and at the outbreak of war with Russia was in the forefront of the drive to the East. For three years he fought in Russia reaching almost the furthest point to be achieved by the German forces, deep into the remote Caucasus. Three times he was completely encircled by Russian forces during the retreat, and fought his way out with a handful of survivors. It will be seen that his experience instilled into him a thorough knowledge of battle tactics, which stood him in good stead at the time of the Caen-Falaise battle.

2. Standing approximately 5 feet 10 inches in height, broad shouldered, thick-set, his whole appearance dominated by his cold grey-blue eyes, which fixed one with what almost amounts to a stare whenever he is talking, Kurt Meyer is



Photo by B.J. Gloster, NAC PA 174283

the personification of National Socialism. His mind, paralyzed with long propaganda, is quite unable to even consider any other point of view. His whole outlook is dominated by the peril of Russia and the Communist threat to Germany, which reason he gives for his wholehearted adherence to Hitler and to his teachings. Time and again throughout the whole conversation he would turn, fixing one or other of the interrogators with the cold stare, saying slowly and distinctly, "As I sit here now, Germany in five years or less will be Communist." The English, he explained, had no idea of Russia, its system of life and its people. They would sweep away all the western culture such as we know it, and would set up in its place their own half developed animal-like existence, which could only mean the complete disappearance of western civilization. When it was suggested to him that Russia might have other things to think about in the next five or ten years than war, with pursed lips and the old familiar state, he replied, "Russia will always have both time and the necessary resources to do what she likes when she likes." This he said was the reason why the Fiihrer had led them into the Russian adventure. The Fiihrer had realized this peril all along, and his one idea was to save Europe from the menace of Bolshevism. He ended one of these statements with the remark that we should find many in the camp who would drag the Fiihrer's name in the dust, but he and those SS men with him would never associate with these ideas, and would always maintain their faith in what he had taught them. When he spoke he spoke quietly but very firmly.

3. It seemed worthwhile to run over with such a man the pre-war years, and obtain from him some idea of how Germany's course of action in those years might appear to be justified in the eyes of the German people. The whole question of Germany's acquisitions prior to the war was discussed, and Meyer agreed that the British offer to send Lord Runciman to Prague was a very reasonable one, but then, of course, the British did not really understand the problem. Czechoslovakia, he said, had for hundreds of years been German, and furthermore, situated as it was in the heart of Germany, so long as it existed in that state would forever be a peril and threat to the very life of the Reich. Could we not see, he said, that advanced air bases would soon

Kurt Meyer sits on a cot in his cell during his war crimes trial at Aurich, Germany in December 1945.

have been used in Czechoslovakia by the Russians. Therefore, in the German process of defeating Bolshevism, Czechoslovakia had to go. He was unable to give any reply when asked to consider whether this was not a very strange way of doing business. Against England, Hitler had no quarrel, and he, himself, with the 1st SS Division which entered Poland on 3 September 1939, was astonished when he heard that England had declared war. He never gave up hope of an agreement being reached between England and Germany. After the conclusion of the campaign in the West, Goering's Luftwaffe was not launched against England, nor were there any serious thoughts of invasion until Mr. Churchill's speeches which emphatically laid down that resistance by the British Empire was to continue.

4. This, briefly, may serve as a slight background to those who are interested in the study of this most ardent disciple of Hitler. One last point which may serve to demonstrate how impossible it is for such as he to be allowed to live in the future world as a normal citizen were his observations on the German concentration camps. Having first denied that he knew anything about what happened inside them, as he said he had always been away fighting the enemy, he was again asked whether he really knew what had occurred inside them. Before he could answer, a detailed description was given to him of what had occurred to two Dutch men personally known to the interrogator. He listened very quietly and did not reply for a few seconds, and then slowly turning he stated, somewhat defiantly, that our soldiers had descended to the mean trick of taking away watches, rings, and private papers from his men. When asked if he honestly considered this a reasonable comparison, he was quite unable to offer any reply. His state of mind, however, is well illustrated by this astonishing comparison which he solemnly offered as an excuse for the bestialities performed by the men wearing the same uniform as himself.

5. On military matters, his mind was crystal clear, and once having oriented himself on the map he was able to go through the campaign phase by phase giving strengths, boundaries, tasks, with consummate ease. The whole time, however, his conversation was coloured by the pride that he had in his men and the way they

had fought. He attempted to dismiss the part played by the Wehrmacht in a few short sentences. Time and again when reminded that the Wehrmacht had also taken a pretty hard knock he would try to dismiss their part as no consequence, while showing how if the SS had not come to the rescue things would have been much worse. To him, the battle of Caen-Falaise was magnificent in the best Wagnerian tradition. As he described his actions and those of his men, it seemed as though he liked to consider himself as Siegfried leading his warriors to their death. When he described how he came out of the Falaise Gap with sixty men, it is likely that the familiar strains of the "Twilight of the Gods" were echoing in his ears. Such is the man Meyer and his story follows.

### **The Division Prior to D-Day**

6. Prior to D-Day, Meyer was the commander of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment and did not take over command of the division until 13 June on the death of the divisional commander, Major-General Witt. For four weeks prior to 6 June, they had been expecting the attack, and he had spent his time familiarizing himself with the various courses of action which were laid down in advance in case of emergency. The division was at full strength with between 20,000 and 21,000 all ranks and approximately 214 tanks. The organization of the division agreed with the normal organization of an SS Armoured Division with exception of the anti-tank battalion. When asked, he immediately filled in the details of the organization of this battalion, which at that time were lacking. The anti-tank battalion consisted of four companies of Panzer IV tanks with long 7.5 cm guns. On D-Day, however, he had only 22 of these. The other 22 were not received until late in July. Within the division were a certain number of foreigners, approximately 500, mostly Russians and Italians. His own driver was a Russian, who gained the Iron Cross, second class. Both Italians and Russians were mostly employed with the administrative troops. Meyer said that he was very familiar with the whole of this District of France because he had been stationed in the Orne area in 1942 with the 1st SS Panzer Division during the time it was refitting after one of its many Russian adventures. He found this experience invaluable, since he possessed a

detailed knowledge not only of the lie of the land, but of the communication system including all the minor roads.

### **Disposition of the Division Prior to D-Day**

7. The division prior to D-Day was disposed as follows:-

- Divisional Headquarters - Aeon
- 25th SS Headquarters - La Trinite, with the regiment in the general area
- 26th SS Headquarters - Dreux, with the regiment to the north of the town
- 12th SS Panzer Regiment - general area of Elbeuf, Louviers, and Neuborg

The role of the 12th SS was to counter-attack any attempt to land north or south of the Seine. That was the main reason for having the tank regiment so near the Seine. The special task of the divisional engineers was to keep the ferries open to enable the tank regiment to be used on either side of the river. The various courses of action, already mentioned, had been most carefully worked out so that when the alarm actually was given, Case I was immediately implemented, and there was no loss of time in making up orders for the advance.

### **6 June**

8. At 0200 hours on the morning of 6 June, Meyer first heard of the landing. He had received his news from the radar station situated on the coast, with whom he had special liaison arrangements. It was not, however, until 1000 hours that orders were received for the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment plus the Panzer abteilung of Panzer IVs to proceed in the direction of the coast. At this time, the 12th SS, together with the 21st Panzer, were under direct command of Panzer Gruppe-West. The first task of this composite battle group was to move in the direction of Houlgate, since it was thought that the landing that had already occurred might be a feint and that the major blow was to fall to the east of the Orne. On their way up, Meyer received orders at 1500 hours when he was at St. Pierre-sur-Dives to change direction and go towards Caen and establish communications with the 21st Panzer Division. The regiment reached Bretteville-sur-Laize at 2200 hours, and

pushed on the Evrecy. At midnight 6-7 June, Meyer went into conference with Feuchtinger of the 21st Panzer Division in Caen, and discussed the position with him. He is reported by Feuchtinger [commander of 21st Panzer] to have considered the British as little fish, adding that in no time he would have the situation under control. It was apparently Feuchtinger's idea to await the arrival of all three divisions, namely, Panzer Lehr, 12th SS and 21st Panzer before launching a counter-attack, but in this he, Feuchtinger, was over-ruled, and on 7 June, it was decided that 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment with the Panzer IVs should attempt to drive through to the sea between Cambes and Cairon. Left flank protection was to be provided by the reconnaissance company up to Tilly-sur-Seulles. On 7 June, this attack was actually launched and succeeded in driving the Canadians from the western approaches to Caen. By the night of 7 June, the line had been stabilized with the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment's right flank on the Caen-Bayeux road. Meyer was asked why this attack had not been successful in achieving more substantial results; he replied that though they had made every effort they were unable to do what they wanted owing to the complete lack of petrol and a certain lack of ammunition. In fact, his tanks were brought to a complete standstill, which resulted in the attack failing in its final objectives. Meyer, in describing the attack said that our tanks had actually reached R9969 about two miles from Caen. His own attack was made with about 40 to 50 tanks, and in the course of the action, he lost approximately 6. The line was then stabilized through Galmanche, Buron, Gruchy, and Point 69.

(Note: Feuchtinger, when questioned on his reason for the failure of the 12th SS, said that the lack of petrol was quite untrue since he, himself, would willingly have given Meyer all the petrol he needed had he asked for it. Feuchtinger states that the reason for the failure of the attack of the 12th SS was because our anti-tank defences were first class).

### **9 June to 7 July**

9. On 9 June, the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment came up and took over the left flank of the divisional sector up to Tilly-sur-Seulles. At this time, Meyer spoke of the conference held



A Panther of the 12th SS knocked out in Brefteville-l'Orgueilleuse by the Regina Rifle Regiment on the night of 8 June 1944. Meyer's interrogators remark that his mind was "crystal clear" on military matters, but he does not comment on his failure to capture the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade position in a series of attacks launched between 7 and 10 June.

with Geyr von Schweppenburg [commander of Panzer Gruppe-West] when it was agreed to put forward to the High Command in the strongest terms that further resistance in Normandy against the overwhelming mass of Allied strength both on land and in the air could only end in disaster; and furthermore, they would advise that steps should be taken at once to retire on to the Seine, using their armoured formations to get the infantry out, thereby giving the infantry the chance to get back behind the Seine. Needless to say, nothing came of this conference or of the advice proffered to the High Command.

10. On 8 June, the 12th SS Division came under command of the 1st SS Panzer Corps. Between 10 and 15 June, the 12th SS Division endeavoured to limit our progress by a series of counter-attacks on the left flank between Tilly-sur-Seulles and the Caen-Bayeux road. At this time, they were heavily reinforced with artillery, which included a flak regiment of 88s, one Werfer brigade with two regiments, a heavy artillery abteilung consisting of two 17 cm batteries and one 21 cm battery, and an additional artillery regiment. During this period and up until the time that the 12th SS Panzer Division shortened its line to take over from Gruchy through Carpiquet to the woods at Tourville, especially

the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the engineer battalion incurred heavy losses. In addition, the division was forced to send help in the shape of one battalion of the tank regiment to the Panzer Lehr Division, who as a result of the fighting had become perilously weak. On 27 June, it was stated in Allied Intelligence Summaries that the 21st Panzer Division and 12th SS Panzer Division were desperately in need of reinforcements. This was no understatement, and though help was given by a regiment of the 1st SS Panzer Division, which came on 28 June, the 12th SS Panzer Division was forced to take up the new positions aforementioned to the west of Caen through Carpiquet etc. because as a result of the losses incurred they were unable to maintain themselves on their original front. Furthermore, the 2nd SS Panzer Corps with the 9th and 10th SS Divisions had made its appearance, thus relieving the immediate situation. Meyer declared that territorially the positions through Carpiquet were much more favourable. By the end of June, his total losses were 1500 men and over 20 tanks. He had also given a tank battalion and an armoured infantry battalion to Panzer Lehr. In the battle prior to falling back on Carpiquet, his losses totaled a further 800 men. Meyer interposed with a remark that during this



Kurt Meyer (left) talks with other German officers in the courtyard of the Abbaye d'Ardenne, June 1944.

bitter fighting he knew of three separate cases in which one of his men had tied explosives to his body and jumped on an Allied tank.

### 8 July

11. As a result of the allied attack on Caen, the division again endured heavy losses, the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment being the chief sufferer, the first battalion having only 200 men left, the second battalion a like number and the third battalion hardly 100. The losses were caused not by the allied bomber attacks, but mainly by the flame throwers that attacked immediately after the bombing ceased, and as result, caught many of the men in a somewhat dazed condition. It was only the arrival of the 21st Panzer Division that saved what might have been a very ugly situation. Waldmuller of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment together with Wunsche of the 12th SS Panzer were able to offer some assistance to the 16th Luftwaffe Division in their predicament, but their combined losses had been too great and they fell back to the Orne where 12th SS took over from point U035672 to Maltot. They were, however, only two days (13 and 14 July) in these positions when they were themselves relieved by the 1st SS. About 14 July, the division was ordered into a rest area in the general area St. Sylvian, Cauvicourt, Bretteville-la-Rabet, and Soumont. Divisional headquarters was at Secqueville. By this time, it was indeed an emaciated division. The reconnaissance battalion, one artillery battery, one complete

regiment, and approximately 140 tanks had been lost. They were receiving no reinforcements except the odd Marsch battalion, which in no way could make up for the staggering losses which they had taken. Tank reinforcements they had none. Clearly, the division could not continue to operate under the old organization with so many of its best men fallen. With the idea of producing three units which would incorporate the essentials of a Panzer Grenadier Regiment, Meyer reorganized the division into a series of battle groups, namely Waldmuller, Krause, and Olbotter. In these groups, they fought till the end in the Falaise Gap.

### 17 July

12. On 17 July, the tanks of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment were ordered up into the area occupied by the 86th Corps, north of the Caen-Vimont road, since the corps commander had applied for help, appreciating that there was to be a further landing or a new allied thrust from the Orne bridgehead. The tanks, however, remained only 24 hours and then returned.

### 18 July

13. 18 July saw the opening of a large-scale Allied attack, by name Operation "Goodwood," but it was not until 20 July that the 12th SS actually took over the sector of the line that lay between Emieville and La Hogue. The strength of the division at this time was approximately 2,000 fighting men only. The tank regiment consisted of about 50 tanks. From about 20 July until the opening of Operation "Totalize" on 8 August, a period of comparative peace and quiet ensued for the division. Though the men were rested and the equipment over-hauled, no reinforcements came to them and their overall weakness was, therefore, not rectified. It had been the plan to relieve the 12th SS by the 116th Panzer Division, which moved into the area around St. Pierre-sur-Dives. But, as a result of the Allied progress, the 116th Panzer Division was moved off elsewhere in an attempt to cope with the serious situation that was beginning to develop in the West.

14 During this static period, the main tasks of the 12th SS, whose headquarters was in the wood at U1968, were the construction of three defence lines. All the divisions, the 21st Panzer on its right and the 1st SS on its left, were similarly employed since it was felt that some form of Allied attack to break the German grip on Caen was the most likely move in the near future. Appreciating this, Meyer realized that we would be urgently in need of information concerning his intentions and his strength. He ordered, therefore, that by day the companies should sleep except for two or three sentries. At sun down, every company would stand-to and maintain an alert throughout the hours of darkness. In this way, Meyer was able to neutralize our patrols and prevent them from taking back information, which they were sent to procure. All the tank and artillery crews were employed on the construction of these three defence lines, which they were busily preparing. The first was a series of battle outposts, which extended from La Hogue on the left up to approximately the wood U1564. The second ran from Point 33 to Bellengreville turning east toward Argences and then north along the high ground. The third line followed the course of the Muance River. At this time, one of the first Flak Sturm regiments of the 111st Flak Corps took up positions on the third line, namely the R Muance. Along the second line, Meyer had had constructed approximately 40 dummy tanks which, however, he backed up with 5 real ones. These tanks, made of wood, were constructed with the idea of concealing the true location of the tank regiment, which at this time was down to about 40 to 50 runners. The real location of the tank regiment was just to the south of Vimont, where they were kept successfully camouflaged, ready, however, to go into action should an armoured breakthrough occur. During this static period, however, the rest of the anti-tank battalion, namely 22 Mark IVs arrived, but before they could go into action they had to be thoroughly overhauled and their guns calibrated. Both Rommel and von Kluge, commander-in-chief West visited the 12th SS and on one occasion at 0400 hours von Kluge with Meyer went up to visit the forward infantry positions. Approximately 29 July, the 21st Panzer Division, right hand neighbour of the 12th SS, was relieved by the 272nd Infantry Division, and as the regiments of the 272nd Infantry Division

Soldiers from the 12th SS Division in Normandy.

arrived, gradually began to take over the sector of the 12th SS Panzer Division. On 5 August, the 12th SS had in fact been fully relieved by the 272nd Infantry Division. The division was brought out and went back into the neighbourhood of the Liason River and had a few hours of rest completely out of the line. The object of this move was to have available an armoured reserve between the Orne and the sea should the Allies attempt to break through south from Caen. In order that the Allies should believe the 12th SS was still in its old area, Meyer left behind near Vimont, a wireless set in a Volkswagen with orders to transmit on the tank regiment frequency (Note: It will be remembered that these relays were in fact picked up by our own special wireless units).

15. Hardly had they been in this position more than a few hours when an appeal came from the German forces struggling to hold off the British, who were attempting to cross the Orne near the forest of Grimbosq. Krause of the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment was sent off with 200 men and 20 tanks to help the sorely-pressed 277th Infantry Division.

### Operation "Totalize"

16. Meyer realized that this period of rest north of Falaise could only be as a drop in the ocean. While he was up in the Vimont area, he had noticed that great activity was going on in the Allied lines. Furthermore, with the situation







Performing maintenance on a camouflaged German tank in Normandy.

deteriorating so rapidly on the Orne front, an attempt to break the German defences around Caen was over-due. He had ensured against being taken by surprise by placing liaison officers with the 277th and 89th Infantry Divisions, so that if an alarm was raised he would at once be fully informed. On the night of 7-8 August, Operation "Totalize" commenced. The Allies had already penetrated to Roquancourt and Garcelles when the alarm reached the 12th SS. Meyer at once got into his car and went to Urville, where he met the divisional commander of the 89th Division, who as a result of the bombing had little or no idea of the true situation. He went by the Caen-Falaise road and found himself in the middle of the bombing. In his own words, he described the situation thus: "I got out of my car and my knees were trembling, the sweat was pouring down my face, and my clothes were

soaked with perspiration. It was not that I was particularly anxious for myself because my experiences of the last five years had inured me against fear of death, but I realized if I failed now and if I did not deploy my division correctly, the Allies would be through to Falaise, and the German armies in the west completely trapped. I knew how weak my division was and the double task which confronted me gave me at that time some of the worst moments I have ever had in my life." At the same time as Meyer was up on that road alone, groups of the 89th Division scattered in panic by the bombing, were making their way down the Caen-Falaise road as quickly as possible. Meyer, on perceiving this serious situation, calmly lit a cigar, stood in the middle of the road and in a loud voice asked them if they were going to leave him alone to cope with the Allied attack when it came. One look at this

young commander was enough and the men turned around and immediately started to take up defensive positions. He must certainly have looked an impressive figure, this 35-year-old divisional commander, wearing the highest decorations that the Germans could bestow on him, quietly but confidently facing this disorderly mob and by his example and sheer determination influencing the whole division to turn back into line and take up the fight once more.

17. Prior to leaving the 89th Division's headquarters, Meyer had ordered two things: first that Waldmuller and a mixed bag of 20 tanks, Tigers, Panthers, and IVs, should come up and take up positions on either side of the Caen-Falaise road at Cintheaux. The Tigers had come from the 101st SS Heavy Tank Battalion, which joined them just prior to this action, and consisted of about eight to ten tanks. The object of moving this battle group to this position was to stop a breakthrough down the main axis of advance towards Falaise. The second thing that Meyer ordered was that Krause, who had been opposing the British, should return at once and then together with Waldmuller, should launch a counter-attack.

## 6 August

18. As a result of the orders given by Meyer, the tanks of Krause arrived in two hours, though his infantry was somewhat slower. The first tanks, which were seen early on the morning of 8 August, were part of Waldmuller's group which was observed moving up the Caen-Falaise road, prior to taking up a defensive position around Cintheaux. As it has already been mentioned, Krause was also directed to this place, and once he had arrived, a combined infantry and tank attack was made against the woods at U0956, which, however, was beaten off with losses.

19. In this action, Captain Wittman, of the 101st Heavy Tank Battalion, was killed. This officer held the record for the number of tanks knocked out by one individual. Since 1943, on the Russian Front, until the time he was killed in Normandy, he was officially credited with having knocked out 143 tanks of all kinds. At the time of his death, he was part of the crew of a Tiger tank. It has been estimated on 9 August, that

the 12th SS Tank Regiment contained 40 Mark IVs, 30 Panzers, and the 101st Heavy Tank Battalion contained 20 Tigers. In fact, according to Meyer they had only a total of 40 tanks in the Panzer regiment, and the 101st Heavy Tank Battalion had only 10. As an afterthought, he mentioned that there were three assault guns from Panzer Abteilung 301 available.

20. At the same time as the German counter-attack failed against the woods already mentioned, the Canadians struck heavy opposition south of the woods in U1160. This opposition came mainly from approximately 20 Panzer IVs belonging to the anti-tank battalion of the 12th SS, who, unable to move across at the time the division moved into reserve owing to troubles of one kind or another, now emerged, all repairs completed. As a result of the day's action and despite the fierce resistance of the 12th SS in company with what remained of the 89th Division, the whole German line was forced back some 5-6 kilometres.

## 8 and 9 August

21. During the night of 8-9 August, the infantry of Krause's group arrived, and were put in south of Bretteville-sur-Laize. In this way, although the village itself had been captured, Meyer hoped to limit our progress on the left flank with the aid of these additional troops. The infantry and tanks of Waldmuller, who, it will be remembered, were primarily responsible for the first counter-attack, had by their action stayed longer than was wise, since the Polish Armoured Division had all but encircled them.

22. As a result of the day's events, Meyer, realizing the strength of the Allied thrust, decided on a new defensive line. He, therefore, went back to carry out personal reconnaissance of the new position which he had chosen, and which he, through long experience, knew so well, namely the Liason Valley. As a result of his reconnaissance, he gave the following orders: Waldmuller was ordered to pull out and make his way back to Maizieres, via St. Sylvian. Krause was ordered to fall back and take up position in the Quesnay Woods, and protect the left flank by holding Fontaine-le-Pin. The artillery was to concentrate around Olendon and Tassilly, with the task of covering the whole divisional front

from including Fontaine-le-Pin to his right boundary, which passed some 2000 metres east of Maizieres. In addition to the normal divisional artillery, Meyer had the assistance of a flak sturm regiment of approximately 30 to 40 88s, and a Werfer Abteilung.

23. The preparations, which were witnessed on 9 August by Allied aircraft along the whole valley of the Liason were, in fact, Meyer's orders of 8-9 August being implemented, with Krause falling back on the left, and Waldmuller pulling back on the right flank. The latter, however, had a very sticky time and incurred heavy losses. At the same time as the withdrawal was taking place on the flanks, the centre was being mainly held by Wunsche with some 20 tanks. The Allied tanks had made a dangerous thrust towards the wood of U1348. On the left, Krause was in position in the Quesnay woods with about 200 men. Wunsche, collecting everything that he had, was able to throw back the Allied thrust, which if it had succeeded, would have broken the whole of the Liason position before they had had time to man it. On the night of 9-10 August, Waldmuller succeeded in returning to the Liason Valley and took up position from Vieux-Fumes, to the woods in U1649.

24. It will be seen at this time that the 12th SS was going through the most critical stage in its career. Its divisional sector extended for approximately 9 miles, and its strength was down to 400 to 500 fighting men and 16 tanks. The only help that it had was from the remnants of the 89th Infantry Division, which, Meyer admitted, was worth very little. On the other hand, the 85th Division was on the point of coming in, and, in fact, the cyclist companies were already arriving, but the divisional commander's statement will be well understood when he said that if help was not forthcoming in the immediate future, he could not hold himself responsible for the further defence of Falaise. His troops had been in action practically continuously since D-Day, and were in urgent need of rest and refit. Finally, they were reduced to a mere handful. The once proud Hitler Youth Division, consisting of 21,000 men and 220 tanks was down to a fighting strength of 450 to 500 men and 16 tanks.

## **10 August**

25. The main event of 10 August was the arrival of the 85th Division, who took over from the right flank, which was previously occupied by Waldmuller and extended to Vieux Fumes, to the Caen-Falaise road on the left. It was a gradual process, as the division came in according to the usual German style, namely in small groups.

26. The appearance of the 85th Division had one important immediate result. It meant that what was left of Waldmuller's group could be withdrawn from the battle and sent out to form the basis of a new Hitler Jugend Division, which had already been decided upon. Meyer admitted that it was normal German practice to withdraw the remnants of good fighting troops from good divisions, before they were entirely wiped out, so that a cadre at least, of experienced troops would be available for re-building the division.

## **From 11 August - Disappearance of the 12th SS as a Fighting Formation**

27. From 11 August to the time when Meyer finally came out of the gap by himself on foot, the story of the 12th SS Panzer Division is very much the same. Its main tasks consisted of taking up a series of defensive positions with gradually decreasing numbers, ending up in the neighbourhood of Trun, where as a division it disappeared almost entirely.

28. Once the 85th Division had taken over, the infantry of the 12th SS were brought out for a two day rest, though the tanks and the artillery remained in battle. Before the 12th SS finally left the Liason Valley, 50 men and a few tanks under Olbotter were sent by Krause to Bray-en-Cinglais to help out the remnants of the 89th Division. On 14 August, when the Allied attack opened with the object of crossing the Liason Valley and driving on Falaise, the 12th SS was thus placed: infantry out of the line, tanks and artillery supporting the 85th Infantry Division and the 89th Infantry Division. At this point, Meyer interposed with the remark that never in his life had he seen his infantry so completely tired out. They came out of the lines asleep and they slept solidly for two days. To these soldiers

rest was more important than food; in his own words, they were completely out.

29. The sector that the 12th SS occupied behind the Liason Valley was in the neighborhood of Olendon-Falaise-Damblainville. This period of rest did not last long and with the Allied threat growing more dangerous hourly through the fall of the Liason Valley position, the 12th SS Division, now reduced to 300 men and 11 tanks, was once more brought in for the final defence of Falaise. The actual positions that were taken up by the division were pointed out by Meyer. The division was split as follows: 80 men in Falaise, who it will be remembered, were

the scene with some 300 reinforcements and what he had been able to procure from the administrative troops, who had left the area over ten days before. He, according to Meyer, was given the task of keeping the exit from the Cauldron open. Meyer was not certain where Waldmuller was located but believed it to be in the area of Grand-Mesnil. One last position was taken up by the last 60 men of the 12th SS inside the cauldron; this position was in the neighbourhood of Vignates. When this had finally been over-run, Meyer reported for orders to Hausser, commander of the 7th Army, who was still inside the cauldron, and it was arranged that he, together with Meindl of the 2nd



A boneyard filled with destroyed and captured German armour southeast of Falaise.

completely wiped out in the post office, 100 men from the northern outskirts of the Bois-du-Roi to the Caen-Falaise road, 20 men at Point 159, 20 men in the wood at U1640, and 50 men in Les Monts D'Erammes. Olbotter still remained with the 89th Division and had with him still his two tanks.

30. The only items of interest before Falaise finally fell were two counter-attacks by Wiinsche at Epaney and up the Caen-Falaise road. Meyer also spoke of the last stand of Krause on the Caen-Falaise road with heavy infantry guns with which he fought to the end. On 16 August, Falaise fell, and the remains of the 12th SS took new positions on the high ground to the south of the town, extending from Point 182 on the left to Les Moutiers-en-Auge on the right. These positions were manned by 120 men and six tanks. At this stage, Waldmuller came back on

Parachute Corps and Schimpf of the 3rd Parachute Division, make a concentrated attempt to break out south of Trun. They became, however, separated, and all Meyer can say is that he personally came out of the gap by himself, led out by a French civilian. Thus ends the story of the 12th SS and the part it took in the Caen-Falaise battle. As a formation, it had been entirely annihilated, and would have ceased to exist altogether, had not Waldmuller been withdrawn.

31. It would appear from the past description as if the 12th SS had been the only formation that had been responsible for this series of well-fought defensive battles. Meyer spoke as if no other division, except the 12th SS, had taken part at all. Of the 89th Division and the 85th Infantry Division, he spoke little and dismissed their contribution in a few trite remarks. The

12th SS was the division, his men had borne uncomplainingly the burden and heat of the battle, which in his long experience was the toughest he had ever fought. He had never experienced such overwhelming might against him either from the land or from the air. He remained to the end intensely proud of the deeds and exploits of his division, which he reckoned had never put up a better show.

32. Naturally, therefore, with a man imbued with such ideas about his own troops, there was little room left for praise of the other troops who took part despite the fact that on a number of occasions both the infantry divisions fought well. The 12th SS had defended Falaise, the 12th SS had had the vast sector to defend, the 12th SS had had the responsibility of saving the German Army from being completely mopped up and it had carried out its tasks to the best of its ability, and incidentally, that of the divisional commander. Thus spoke the fanatic Meyer, the intrepid young divisional commander.

### General Remarks

33. The few general remarks that Meyer had made on the fighting may be of interest. He said that there was one thing to which he must draw our attention, and that was the lack of wireless security of the Allied forces who opposed him. It was not only within units that it was bad, but frequently orders were given over the air by senior commanders who should have known better, which he was able to pick up and immediately initiate counter-measures before the orders were implemented by the Allied troops. Frequently, he would get warning of our attacks in this way, and as frequently, he was able to neutralize them.

34. Another criticism he made was the astonishing amount of valuable material carried in tanks. Code signs, simple map codes, cover names for places, not for one day but sometimes for 3 and 4 days, were frequently found on captured tanks. In fact, so valuable did this prove, that it was always an accepted process to let an Allied tank come into the German lines before knocking it out, so that these valuable stocks of codes, etc. could be obtained. On the

question of our air superiority, he said that he thought this was one of the greatest factors in our success, not through our heavy bomber attacks, but the fighter-bomber, which harassed him from early morning to dewy dusk. The attacks on headquarters he confirmed as being very accurate. His rear headquarters, at one stage was severely engaged at Urville and many vehicles were knocked out. At the time of the attack on his headquarters to the east of Bons-Tassilly in the Liason Valley, he himself was within a stone's throw of the building. He saw the building go up in flames, and stood there, as an interested eyewitness. Speaking in general of the fighting on the Liason Valley, he said that he had exploited the mobility of his tanks, in order to deceive the Allies of the numbers available. Directly after a tank had shot, it immediately changed position, giving the impression of many more than were actually there. On the work of the 88s he spoke enthusiastically, especially of the action at Point 195 when he inflicted a heavy defeat on our own armour. He never quite understood why we had let ourselves get into this situation, but he said, "Once you were in that position, we did not hesitate to make you pay for it."

35. On the general form of the invasion, he confirmed exactly what Feuchtinger, commander of the 21st Panzer Division, had said respecting the schemes of Rommel and Rundstedt to defeat the Allied landings. Rommel wanted everything, including the armoured forces on the coast, so that the invasion could be defeated on the beaches. Rundstedt, however, preferred to have his armour in reserve and to use it as a mobile counter-attack force. One last point; during some of this conversation, Wunsche, commander of the 12th Panzer Regiment, was present. Slightly younger than Meyer, decorated like a Christmas tree, he was a similar example of the system as Meyer. His ideas and general philosophy of life were stated in exactly the same terms as those of Meyer. In appearance he was approximately 6 feet 4 inches in height, broad-shouldered, though by no means stout. A good-looking man, blonde, with eyes not unlike Meyer's, and in one phase the perfect example of Aryan youth as laid down in the pages of "Mein Kampf."