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GERMAN ARMORED CAR  
RECONNAISSANCE

SOURCE

This bulletin is based upon reports submitted by American official observers in Berlin. The translated sections are from the Militär Wochenblatt, a semi-official German publication.

Intended propagandistic effects should not be overlooked.

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Figure 1. Light 4-Wheeler Armored Car. This car has the following characteristics:

<u>Weight</u>	4-7 tons	<u>Armament</u>	one 20-mm. M.G. one light M.G.
<u>Crew</u>	3	<u>Horsepower</u>	75
<u>Armor Basis</u>	.32 in. .59 in. visors	<u>Drive</u>	4-wheel
	<u>Road Speed</u>		30 mph.

GERMAN ARMORED CAR  
RECONNAISSANCE

1. INTRODUCTION

a. The German Reconnaissance Battalion

(1) Organization and Function

The Germans do not use large cavalry units (motor, mechanized, or horse) for distant reconnaissance missions in front of their advancing armies. Instead, in France, each partly motorized, motorized, light, and armored division was provided with a reconnaissance battalion. In addition to these battalions, there were separate units, known as army reconnaissance battalions, which were available to each army in the field for close reconnaissance missions.

These reconnaissance battalions, together with reconnaissance aviation, furnished the division and higher commanders with information upon which they based their tactical decisions and formulated their plans for engagement with the enemy.

Some armored divisions are believed to be provided with a reconnaissance regiment, consisting of two or more battalions which have appropriate antiaircraft, antitank, pioneer, and signal units. It is not known whether the reconnaissance strength of motorized and partly motorized divisions has been so augmented since the campaign on the Western Front.

The reconnaissance battalion is organized generally as follows:

- 1 headquarters;
- 2 armored car\* companies, each with
  - 6 heavy armored cars,
  - 18 light armored cars;
- 1 motorcycle rifle company, each provided with light mortars and light and heavy machine guns;
- 1 heavy company, composed of
  - 1 antitank platoon,
  - 1 pioneer platoon,
  - 2-75-mm. howitzers.

(2) Training Principles of Reconnaissance Battalions

In the training of reconnaissance battalions, emphasis

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\*Figures 1, 2, and 3 will give pictures and characteristics of some of the German armored cars.

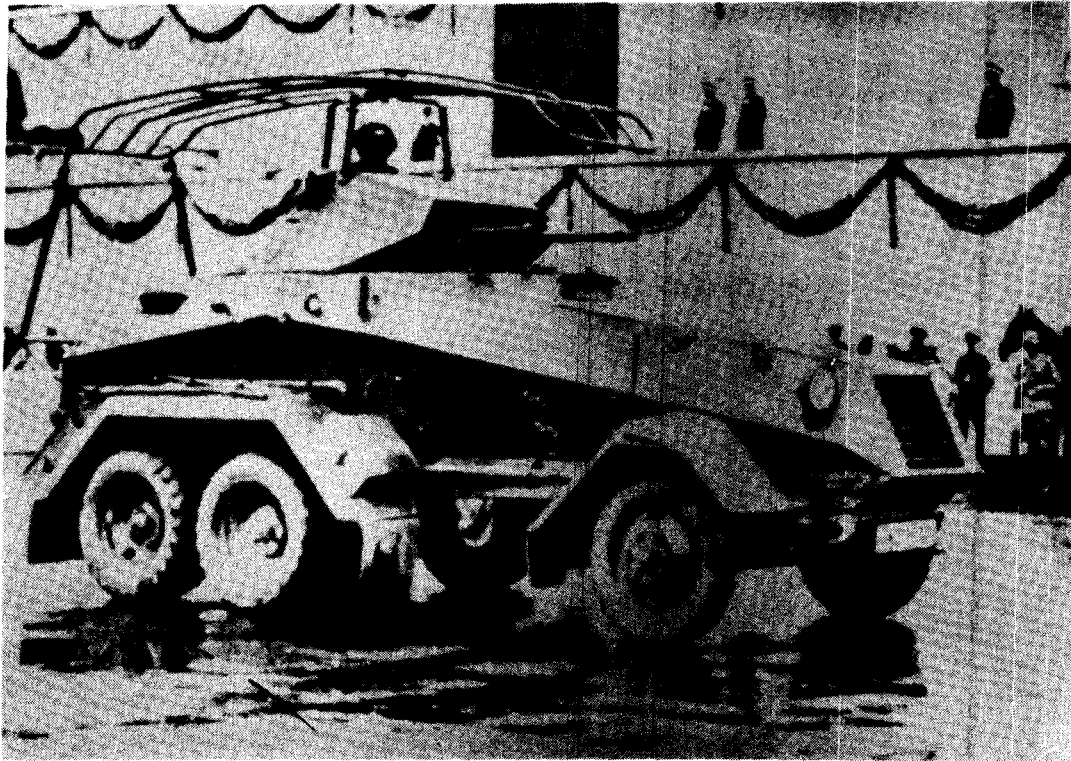


Figure 2. Medium 6-Wheeler Armored Car. This car has the following characteristics:

<u>Weight</u>	6.4 tons	<u>Armament</u>	one 20-mm. M.G.
<u>Crew</u>	4	<u>Horsepower</u>	100
<u>Armor Basis</u>	.55 in.	<u>Drive</u>	rear 4-wheel
		<u>Road Speed</u>	50 mph.

is placed upon initiative and aggressiveness both in securing and in reporting information. These units are provided with sufficient mobility, fire power, and armor protection to enable them to overcome small covering groups and determine the disposition of the main hostile forces. Hence, as employed in the German Army, these units provide a considerable amount of security in the performance of their reconnaissance tasks. German instruction pamphlets and accounts of combat experiences, as well as reported conversations with German military personnel, indicate that reconnaissance battalions are trained, and normally operate, in accordance with the principles summarized below:

(a) Division reconnaissance battalions operate directly under the orders of the division commander. The extent of the area in which the battalion is to operate and the time-distance that it precedes the division depend upon the situation and mission.

(b) The reconnaissance battalion commander issues orders for the execution of his assigned mission and dispatches the required patrols.

(c) The strength and composition of a patrol depend upon the mission it is to accomplish, the situation--especially with respect to the nature of the hostile resistance--, and the terrain. The patrol however, must be composed of at least two vehicles and must include at least one vehicle equipped with a sending and receiving radio set.

There are roughly five types of patrols, generally as follows:

Heavy patrol, composed of heavy armored cars;  
Light patrol, composed of light armored cars;  
Mixed patrol, composed of both heavy and light armored cars;  
Reinforced patrol, composed basically of one of the above types but reinforced with motorcycle riflemen, pioneers, or attached troops from other divisional units;  
Motorcycle patrol, composed of motorcycle riflemen.

(d) Normally, all patrols are taken from one or the other of the two armored car companies in the battalion. When there are unusual conditions, such as an extensive reconnaissance area or a particularly dense road net, patrols may be taken initially from both armored car companies.

(e) When the enemy is at a considerable distance, the main part of the battalion is preceded by a wave of small patrols, normally dispatched to the front and flanks and given the mission of searching out and locating the enemy in a designated area, or establishing contact with hostile units already reported by aerial reconnaissance. In such cases, it is usually sufficient to search the most important roads and traffic routes. In order to determine the whereabouts, composition, and behavior of an indefinitely located enemy, it is necessary to increase the density of the reconnaissance.



Figure 3. Heavy 8-Wheeler Armored Car. This car has the following characteristics:

<u>Weight</u>	9-10 tons	<u>Armament</u>	one 20-mm. M.G. one light M.G.
<u>Crew</u>	4 or 5	<u>Horsepower</u>	90-100
<u>Armor Basis</u>	1.14 in.	<u>Drive</u>	8-wheel
	<u>Road Speed</u>		53 mph.

(f) The situation and the terrain determine whether the patrols should depart from the reconnaissance battalion assembly area, or whether they should be dispatched later, when a certain section of the terrain has been reached.

(g) The time-distance that the first reconnaissance wave operates ahead of its battalion is determined by the distance to the enemy, the terrain, and the range of the patrol's radio equipment.

(h) The reconnaissance battalion commander normally maintains direct radio contact with his patrols. When radio silence is necessary in order to avoid betrayal of the battalion's approach, early messages are sent by motorcyclists attached to the patrol. Occasionally civilian telephone lines may be used for this purpose.

(i) Certain phase lines are designated, and patrols must report when they cross these lines, even if contact with the enemy has not yet been established.

(j) The battalion commander's oral order to his patrols includes particulars concerning the situation, terrain, results of aerial and other reconnaissance, mission of the battalion, and intentions of the battalion commander. The particulars of the general situation are especially important, and the patrol leader should be always told where the first contact with the enemy can be expected as well as the type of enemy units he may expect to encounter. The general information mentioned above is normally given to the patrol leaders as a group. Each individual patrol leader in turn is then given a specific oral order which ordinarily includes the following:

- Strength and composition of the patrol;
- Mission;
- Reconnaissance objective;
- Route;
- Action to be taken after reaching the objective (whether to maintain contact with the enemy, continue reconnaissance into the hostile area, or return);
- Place and hour of departure;
- Special instructions concerning conduct of the patrol (these varying according to the situation and the terrain).

(k) The special information desired by the battalion commander should be listed by the patrol leader in order of priority.

(l) In determining the hour of departure, the battalion commander should make allowances for the time needed by the patrol leader to make his preliminary preparations, even when the situation demands the prompt dispatch of the patrol.

(m) Dual missions should be avoided. Demolitions should be executed by special groups attached to the patrol. Such groups may join an advancing patrol after the hour of departure.

(n) At night, reconnaissance activities consist primarily of observing highways. Patrols remaining in the vicinity of the enemy during the night should observe from such shelter as wooded areas or farm buildings.

(o) When advancing, the reconnaissance battalion, less patrols, is organized into an advance guard and a main body. The advance guard and the main body are both preceded by an "armored point" composed of two to five armored cars. The main body is frequently followed by a similar "armored point."

(p) The strength of the advance guard depends on the situation, the terrain, and the strength of the main body. Appropriate orders must be issued to the advance guard commander if he is to be responsible for special security measures such as flank patrols and protection of side roads.

(q) The advance guard usually consists of the remainder of the armored car company which has furnished the first wave of patrols, and the motorcycle rifle company. Pioneers and antitank guns are attached to the advance guard if their need is foreseen.

(r) The main body usually follows 20 minutes in rear of the advance guard. This time-distance is changed in accordance with terrain and weather conditions.

(s) The point advances by leaps and bounds. The distance between the point and the remainder of the advance guard varies according to the terrain.

(t) The antitank mission is taken over by antitank guns and armored cars equipped with armor-penetrating weapons. The anti-aircraft mission is taken over by light armored cars, which are armed with machine guns only, and by anti-aircraft guns mounted on trucks.

(u) All security measures are arranged so there will be a minimum separation and disorganization of units.

(v) The commander of the reconnaissance battalion makes provisions for a reserve reconnaissance force, a message center, and an assembly point for patrols.

(w) The battalion advances by bounds, the length of which is dependent upon the distance to the enemy, the nature of the terrain, and the cover available. The battalion commander usually moves with or just in rear of the advance guard, where he can easily maintain contact with the advance guard commander as well as with the main body.

(x) The signal officer, the commander of the reconnaissance reserve troops, and the commander of the heavy company are normally with the battalion commander. That part of the signal platoon which maintains contact with the patrols, higher headquarters, neighboring reconnaissance forces, and main body, marches with the advance



guard. The rest of the signal platoon remains with the main body.

(y) The combat train usually marches with or follows the main body, although it may remain behind at a designated point to be brought up later under cover. The disposition of the trains depends upon the situation and the mission, and, above all, upon the security of the ammunition and fuel. The train commander is responsible for this security. In case the trains remain in rear, he maintains contact with the combat elements of the battalion by motorcycle messenger.

(z) All incoming messages are given to the battalion commander, who immediately relays the important messages to his division commander. The battalion commander may give a summary of the hostile situation to the division commander at regular intervals. Sometimes the battalion commander may even send one of his officers to the division commander if the message is especially important.

### (3) Training Principles of German Armored Patrols

The following notes taken from German instruction pamphlets indicate the manner in which German armored patrols operate:

(a) When encountering a hostile infantry group on a highway, the armored patrol should move off the road immediately, if practicable, and combat the hostile group from the flank rather than attempt to fight on the highway. The vehicles following the patrol should be warned at once.

(b) When on reconnaissance or when moving on terrain where the enemy is likely to be encountered, all crew members should be maintaining continuous observation at their posts, and all weapons should be ready to open fire instantly.

(c) When the patrol is advancing toward a known or suspected hostile position, at least one vehicle should observe from cover and concealment while one or more vehicles should advance by a covered route or routes. If no covered route is available, then the position should be approached from two or more directions simultaneously.

(d) Positions and routes should be selected so that one vehicle will not mask the fire of another.

(e) Upon sighting a hostile motorcyclist within effective range, armored reconnaissance vehicles should halt momentarily and open fire upon him immediately in order to prevent him from escaping and warning hostile troops which may be following. Fire from a moving vehicle is generally inaccurate and may permit the hostile motorcyclist to escape.

(f) An armored reconnaissance group should not halt and

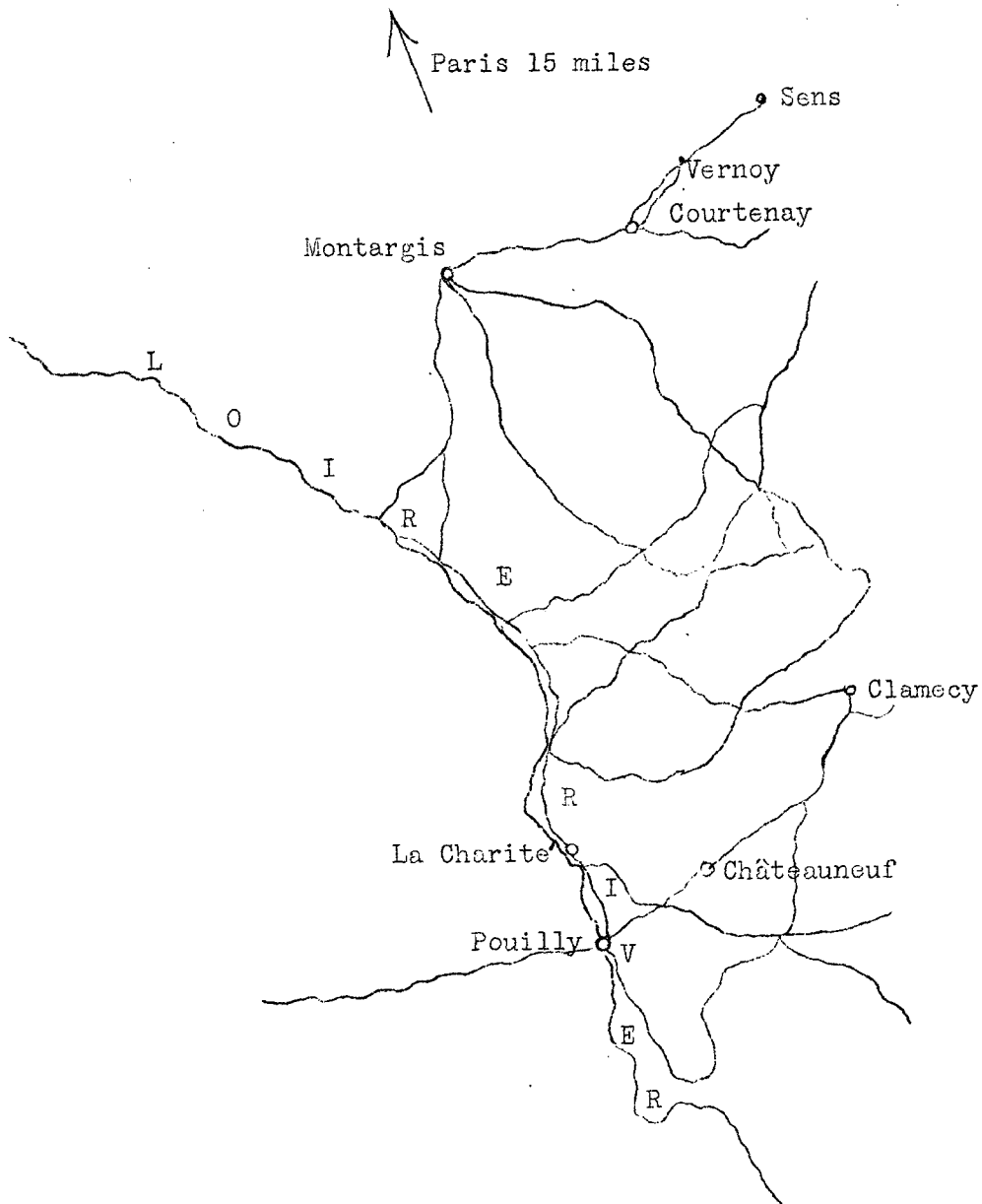


Figure 4. Approach to La Charité.

engage in a frontal fire fight with a hostile protective group of a route barrier. An immediate attempt should be made to maneuver around it, under cover of friendly vehicles, to fire from concealed positions, and to attack the hostile protective group from the flank or rear.

(g) A destroyed bridge over a small stream should be reported immediately, and a search for detours or fords should be made without waiting for pioneer assistance.

(h) Approaches to villages or other critical localities should not be made by an exposed or normal route, but the best available cover should be utilized.

(i) Before emerging from a woods, the patrol should take up a concealed position just inside the woods. From there it should search briefly, through field glasses, the open terrain ahead. Observation positions should not be at the very edge of the woods.

(j) Vehicles should not be halted in positions where their movement will be restricted. Whenever halting, drivers should determine immediately how best to move out in any direction.

(k) Except for purposes of self-preservation, the patrol should not engage in any unnecessary action that will interfere with the assigned mission.

(l) The commander under whom the patrol is operating should be informed of the situation and terrain as they are observed.

## 2. TRANSLATIONS

### a. Reconnaissance Battalion in Action

"On June 16, 1940, the 6th Company was ordered to march as an advance guard to La Charite', by way of Sens and Courtenay and from there to seize and secure the Loire bridge (see figure 4).

"When the company arrived at a point about 2 miles south of Vernoy, a messenger from the reconnaissance patrol, operating ahead on the regimental route of march, reported to me that it had encountered a barricade protected by hostile tanks and antitank guns. Continuing in the direction of Courtenay, I transmitted this report immediately to the battalion commander, who was following in rear of my company.

"About 1 mile east of Courtenay, I met the returning reconnaissance patrol commanded by Lieut. Aicher, who informed me that hostile tanks were moving from Courtenay toward the regiment.

"I halted the armored point\* at once and placed three motor

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\*See p. 4, par. (o), above.

vehicles and the company's antiquated 6-wheel armored car across the road for protection against frontal fire. Upon request, the battalion commander, who had arrived in the meantime, furnished an antitank gun, which was placed in position a few yards from the armored car. While walking ahead, accompanied by the gunner from this car, and followed by Lieut. Wichert in his armored car, we received hostile rifle fire from a point about 300 yards west of the road. After reporting this encounter with the enemy, we again crossed the railroad tracks and advanced to the edge of Courtenay, where we were confronted with a barricade protected by an antitank gun, some tanks, and several soldiers. We at once opened fire upon it but suddenly received additional fire from an area about 800 yards north of Courtenay. This fire was likewise returned.

"Lieut. Wichert's reconnaissance car soon had to drop out of the fight because of a faulty loading mechanism, but Lieut. Aicher had arrived with his car in the meantime and opened an effective fire against the groups protecting the barricade. Upon the arrival of the battalion commander we made a personal reconnaissance on foot and saw that the hostile protecting groups were retreating. Consequently, we advanced to the barricade, where we found an antitank gun, and, on a side street, three hostile tanks. We removed the barricade, and, with several reconnaissance cars that had arrived in the meantime, we proceeded toward the town. En route we met a fourth enemy tank, and at the western edge of the town we encountered another improvised barricade, which we soon removed.

"Farther west we met a truck loaded with French soldiers. After effectively dealing with it we continued our advance towards La Charite'.

"We were frequently hampered by numerous refugee columns and enemy riflemen, but we continued to move forward steadily until we arrived in the vicinity of Clamecy, where the point reconnaissance car had to drop out because of motor trouble. I then took over the command of the armored point, followed by the remainder of the company, which consisted of about 8 motorcycles and 10 to 12 armored cars. The company was followed by the battalion staff and the battalion signal platoon.

"At times the point moved at a speed of 40 to 45 miles an hour; hence the battalion was 6 to 9 miles behind the company. The only resistance during this part of our advance was provided by several low-flying pursuit planes that twice attacked the company with machine guns.

"The company, when about 2 miles southwest of Nannay, was ordered to proceed as far as the small woods just north of Raveau, and from there to send forward a group to reconnoiter the Loire bridge at La Charite'. After assigning this mission to the sergeant major, I drove back to the battalion command post, which was then

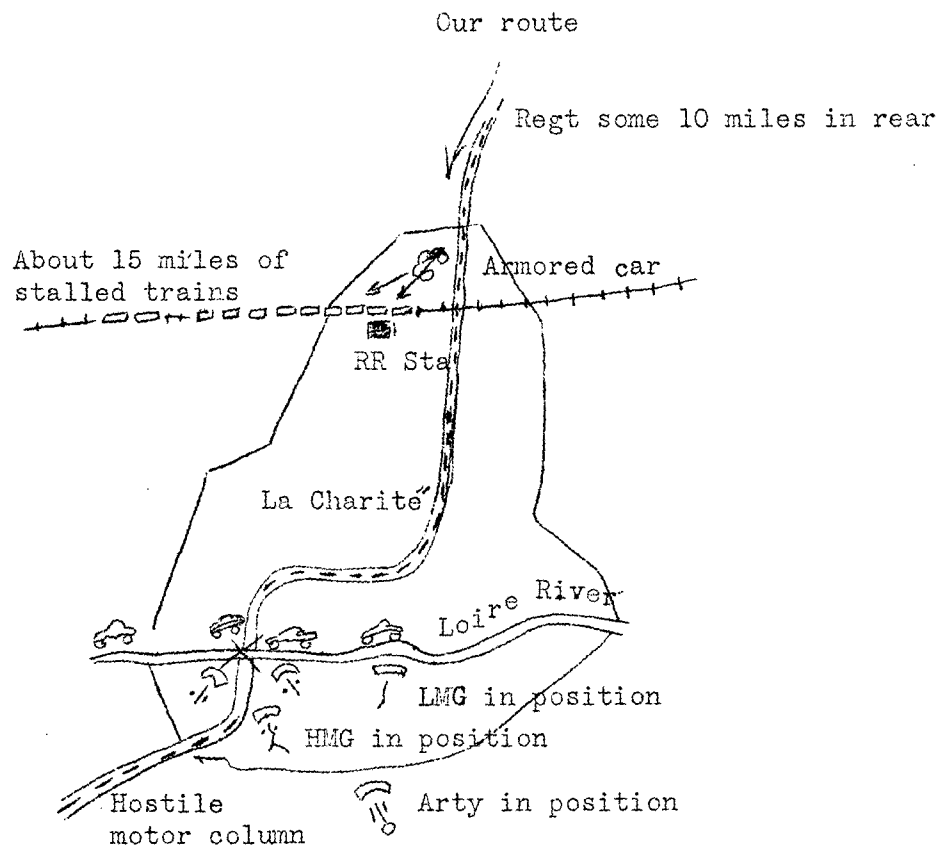


Figure 5. Action at La Charité.

in the vicinity of Châteauneuf. There I met the regimental commander, who, after issuing some orders, drove ahead with me to the company, which was then near Raveau. In the meantime the sergeant major had returned from his reconnaissance.

"He reported to me that he had encountered an enemy antitank gun at the railroad crossing at the eastern edge of La Charite'. At the same time I received a report that the commander of the reconnaissance patrol operating ahead of the regiment had already gone forward to reconnoiter the railroad crossing. Then I also went ahead to the railway station and there discovered several loaded troop trains which were protected by only one antitank gun. Meanwhile the regimental commander had issued orders to attack the railway station and capture the town and bridge (see figure 5).

"We engaged the antitank gun with five armored cars. After a short fight, the antitank gun withdrew and we attacked the soldiers (about 100 to 200 men) on the troop trains at the station. We then drove on into the town with the battalion commander, who had arrived in the meantime. When we reached the church, we heard an explosion at the bridge.

"We proceeded with the point vehicle to the curve in the street from which we could see three French soldiers and two civilians busy with sandbags on the near end of the bridge. We opened fire at once, wounding two of them, and then drove on up to the bridge, where we received fire from several machine guns and riflemen on the opposite bank. We returned this fire and sent out flank protection immediately to the parallel streets. A hostile motor column on the other side of the river was successfully engaged and two of its vehicles were burned and others damaged. After a long fire fight at the bridge and some activity by the enemy artillery we silenced the adversary on the other bank. Before dark, elements of the 1st Battalion were across the Loire, and a bridgehead was established in accordance with orders of the regimental commander, who had arrived on the scene in the meantime.

"On the same evening, the railroad tracks in the neighborhood of the station were blown up, preventing further movement of troop trains toward the west. During the night, our security groups attacked some trains that arrived with armed enemy troops. On the next day, June 17, the following results of our actions were noted:

"(1) Trains were stalled from La Charite' north to a point 1 mile south of Mesves-sur-Loire. They were loaded with troops, refugees, and war material, including an immense quantity of fuel, ammunition, infantry weapons, engineer equipment, aircraft accessories, four apparently new tanks, six 105-mm. guns, and railroad building material.

"(2) Trains were stalled from Mesves-sur-Loire to Pouilly-sur-Loire. They were loaded with troops, refugees, and war material, including artillery ammunition, communication equipment, and miscel-

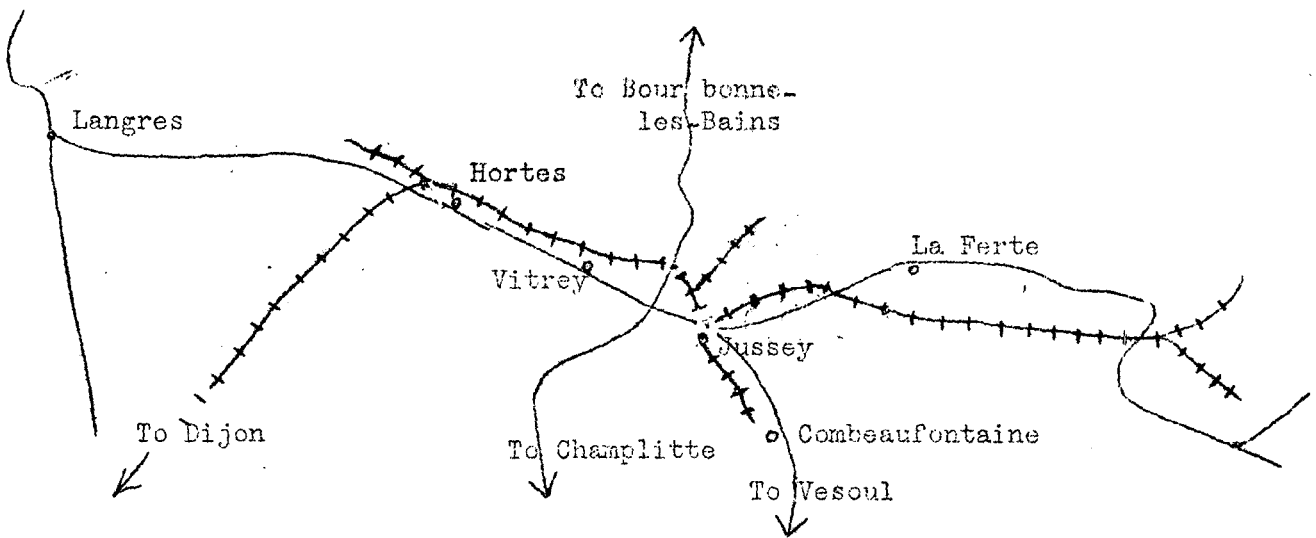


Figure 6. Area between Langres and Jussey.

laneous items. These trains were protected by French soldiers equipped with antitank guns and machine guns. These men were forced to surrender.

"(3) According to statements of a French officer and several railway employees, about 12 or 15 miles of trains were stalled from La Charite' to the north."

b. Reconnaissance Patrol in Action\*

"After advancing for a distance of 125 miles, our division reached Langres on the evening of June 15 (see figure 6). There Lieut. Prohl's patrol, consisting of two 8-wheel reconnaissance cars, was ordered to reconnoiter to the east for a distance of 35 miles and to blow up the railway line at the Jussey junction so as to block all transportation to the south. Since the pressure on the Maginot Line had become very strong, the French were trying to move part of their forces to the south. For this reason the mission was extremely important and had to be carried out with the greatest care.

"At 7:30 p.m. the patrol left Langres. About 8 miles to the east, our advance road crossed over the railway line coming from Jussey, and there we encountered the first transport train. When we first saw the transport train from an elevation just west of the crossing, we halted and took cover, letting it pass by undisturbed. After reporting this by wireless to the battalion, which the train was bound to meet on the way, we continued our advance. The highway between Hortes and Vitrey runs parallel to the railway for part of the way at a distance of 500 yards from it, and we met two other transport trains while moving along this road. The poilus leaned on their elbows in the windows and looked at us with the greatest astonishment. We sent another message back to the battalion and sped past the trains at full speed, knowing that the battalion would be ready for them. It seemed almost as if the French had not been aware that we were Germans. Under no circumstances were we to take up the fight with them now or we would very likely fail to carry out our mission.

"We drove on, having very little contact with the enemy, and arrived at the important junction of the highways Langres--Combeaufontaine and Bourbonne-les-Bains--Champlitte. On this highway there was considerable vehicle traffic moving towards the south. We halted just before we reached the junction and remained under cover, waiting until the way was free. After a few minutes, we decided to cross over in spite of the fact that single vehicles were still passing. We reached the crossing just as 2 French trucks transporting

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\*The reconnaissance car platoon mentioned in this narrative is believed to be part of a reconnaissance battalion assigned to a panzer division in General Guderian's panzer army. General Guderian's panzer army crossed the Meuse near Rethel about June 10, 1940, advanced to the Swiss border, and then turned east to trap the French forces holding the Maginot Line.



about 50 soldiers came toward us from the north. As there were houses on either side of the street, neither of us had seen the other. We stood facing each other a few yards apart, and when the driver of the first truck saw the two reconnaissance cars facing him and the muzzles of the cannons pointed directly at him, he realized the futility of resistance, and the two trucks with their occupants became ours.

"We quickly disarmed the 50 men and disabled the trucks by disconnecting the fuel feed. Since we could not take them with us, we left the French behind and continued on. In every village that we passed we found from 30 to 40 French soldiers. Many of them were sitting with inhabitants in the streets. They had unbuckled their belts, had laid their weapons aside, and had made themselves comfortable. They were so surprised on seeing us that they were not able to fire a shot. We disarmed almost 250 men, and at about 10 p.m. arrived in Jussey, where we were to blow up the railway tracks. We had covered the 30 miles in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

"Parking the reconnaissance cars in the shelter of the woods, we went over to the other side of the tracks, where the station was situated. The demolition point lay about 200 yards from the station and 50 yards from the edge of the woods. The No. 1 gunner of the wireless tank remained at the edge of the woods with the sub-machine gun. The forward and rear drivers of the point tank proceeded to the station master's house, a small building near the station, to protect the flank and cut the telephone lines. The two reconnaissance car commanders then proceeded to lay the explosive charges. While they were thus occupied, a transport train came rolling along another track several yards from them. It slowed down and to my horror I saw that the signal had been set at 'Stop.' I thought we were all lost, for the train stopped just in front of us. The French sprawled at the windows; one of them was playing a harmonica--the others were singing a song and looking at the countryside. I looked around to see if our four men were visible, but there was nothing to be seen of them. They had crouched down beside the tracks and, thanks to the approaching twilight, could not be distinguished in their black uniforms. Suddenly the tension was broken: the signal was raised and the train whistled sharply and rolled on. We all heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"The explosives were quickly put into place and tamped, the fuze was set, and 1 minute later the charges exploded. Pieces of stone and iron were hurled through the air with a roar. The tracks had been torn apart. We had succeeded in disrupting the railway--the order had been carried out. We started on our way home, but in the meantime it had become dark. Suddenly, to our right, we saw a white cloud of smoke rising up into the sky and, realizing immediately what it was, we halted and saw the transport train rolling slowly through the moonlit countryside. We caught it on our sights, and each of the reconnaissance cars fired a clip of shells into the boiler. An enormous column of smoke rose into the air and the train stopped. In this way we brought three transport trains to a stop in a stretch of 2 miles. At 1 a.m. we arrived at the battalion without any

casualties or damage.

"Next morning we drove again to Jussey. A few miles before Jussey we took several Alsations prisoner. They told us that on the previous evening, after the railway tracks had been blown up, their lieutenant had sent out the whole company to search for the parachutists who had supposedly carried out this action."

### 3. COMMENT OF OFFICIAL OBSERVERS

#### a. Remarks on Reconnaissance Battalion in Action

(1) It is believed that the 9th Reconnaissance Battalion, at the time of this narrative, was preceding a motorized infantry regiment and that the battalion commander worked in close cooperation with the infantry regimental commander.

(2) According to other published articles and newsreels, armored car crews must frequently dismount and perform extensive reconnaissance on foot in order to obtain detailed information concerning the terrain and the strength, composition, and disposition of hostile forces.

(3) This article emphasizes the fact that a barricade is effective only when it is protected by fire. It happened frequently in France that unprotected barricades did not decrease the rate of march of the main body, because the advance elements, operating unmolested, removed such obstacles or discovered suitable routes to detour around them.

(4) The action between the reconnaissance battalion and the troop trains in the vicinity of La Charité indicates the necessity for a defensive organization on the part of such troops, not only against aerial attacks, but also against ground attacks supported by armored units. In any event, such troops should not consider themselves merely as passengers. Given proper leadership and equipment, these French troops could have caused considerable delay to the German advance in this area.

#### b. Remarks on Reconnaissance Patrol in Action

Noteworthy features of this narrative of personal experience are as follows:

- (1) Type of mission assigned a reconnaissance car platoon;
- (2) Lack of resistance on the part of the French and their failure to take security measures;
- (3) Method of disabling the captured French trucks;
- (4) Use of radio between reconnaissance car platoon commander and reconnaissance battalion commander;
- (5) Method of putting steam locomotive out of action (it is assumed that armor-piercing ammunition was used);
- (6) The effectiveness of armored patrols in the enemy rear.