

Dublin Chronicle

October 1939 - Special Report

French Attack German Lines

French Troops were placed on orders to move on October the 3rd, with the expectation that the Germans would advance across the border to attack on or around the 7th of October.

This is what we, as reporters were told, together with the thousands of French Soldiers in the Field, then at 11:30am on the 4th a meeting of the Battalion NCOs was called to which we were invited, it was at this meeting that we were informed that the reason the battalion had been pulled from the rear area to the front was because the Corps would be the lead element in a strike into Southern Germany.



At 07:15 on the morning of the 5th forces from Strasbourg south to Mulhouse launched assaults, on the German lines. There was no preparatory artillery bombardment, this was to be an attack of total surprise upon the German formations, and in the first 2 hours the effects of the various attacks appeared to be just that, a surprise,

German formations gave ground and in some places pulled back from fixed defences. The main thrust of the attack came from our own formation, the soldiers of the 156th Battalion acting as the spearhead of a three corps advance into the German formations around Freiburg.

The initial advance went well and the forward German defences were quickly overwhelmed, but problems grew as the German defences started to take shape, by 11:00 the Battalion was making no forward movement and many of the company we were travelling with were killed or wounded by German machine gun and artillery fire.

By late evening the situation had improved as we became aware that further French forces had been committed to attack the Germans between Kehl and Freiburg. This action seems to have forced the Germans to withdraw further in order to protect their flanks, thus allowing our own formation to once again pick-up the advance on the 6th.

The next few days proved deadly, German counterattacks and set piece defences caused massive damage to the French attackers, by the 18th the battalion had all but ceased to exist and was now operating with three other battalions in a composite formation. Fresh forces were constantly being added to the melting pot, but any great headway now proved impossible.

By the 25th the attack had ground to a halt. The Germans had given ground but not been forced to retreat, our own formations were shattered and morale is at rock bottom. I now stand in Germany, with a French Army that does not want to be here!

Reported by Keith Sullivan for Independent News, with French forces in the field.