

Case
X UNIT: 150 Engr C Bn

PERIOD: 4-13 February 1945

ACTION: OUR and SAUER River Crossings

SOURCES: Lt Col Bruce W Reagan, CO
Capt Arthur E MacHolm, Ex O
Capt James G McCann, Jr, Bn S-3
Capt Victor L Christiansen, Bn S-2
1st Lt John F Mann, Ln O to 1135th Engr C Gp

(NOTE: Capt McCann, the Bn S-3, furnished most of the information.)

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: MEDERNACH, LUXEMBOURG, 13 Feb 45.

INTERVIEWER: Capt D G Dayton

MAPS: Germany 1/12,500 (Sheet #6103 - Wallendorf, NE)

On 4 February the 150th Engr C Bn was given their mission in the prospective crossing of the OUR River. 1st Lt Arthur C Swenholt, the Bn Rcn Officer, was immediately dispatched to make the initial reconnaissance of the river line. He began his study from the high ground (945429) about 1000 yards southeast of HOESDORF (937436). As he moved from the cover of some trees on to the open ground, he drew fire from enemy pillboxes across the river, was wounded, and had to be evacuated. Enemy fire prevented other effective daylight reconnaissance. On the night of 5-6 February, 1st Lt Reno S Villadsen crossed the river via a rubber reconnaissance boat in the vicinity of HOESDORF with an infantry patrol from the 319th Inf Regt. The patrol reconnoitered the north bank of the river from HOESDORF east to a point about 500 yards west of the near edge of WALLENDORF (961428). It was so dark, however, that little definite information about the river could be obtained. The patrol returned to HOESDORF along the southern edge of road which parallels the SIEGFRIED Line on the north side of the OUR. The patrol discovered that Germans were not occupying positions immediately adjacent to the river and found no mines.

③ Lt Villadsen brought back data relative to the rate of flow of the stream and its

width (this data was later found to be inaccurate). On the afternoon of the 5th, Capt V L Christiansen, Bn S-2, had attempted to reconnoiter the site for the intended infantry support bridge (957430) near WALLENDORF. He was unable to reach the site for measurement and observation because of small arms fire from the northwest edge of the town. Previous to the attack on the 7th there was considerable artillery and mortar fire all along the ridge overlooking the rivers.

The 150th Engr Bn's mission in the attack of the 7th was to man the assault boats which carried the initial waves of infantrymen across the OUR River and, simultaneous with the crossings, build two footbridges just above and adjacent to the crossing sites. The infantry commander located the crossing sites--one about 800 yards west of WALLENDORF (952430) (which I shall refer to in this interview as Site #1), the other approximately 500 yards down stream from HOESDORF (939438) (which I shall refer to in the interview as Site #2). The infantry support bridge was to be put in just above the old bridge site a short distance west of WALLENDORF (this shall be referred to in interview as Site #3).

~~The entire engineer~~ ^{Both infantry} battalions were to be crossed in a column of companies -- the companies in a column of platoons. To accomplish this four assault boats were to cross abreast, each carrying seven infantrymen and the manning engineer crew of three men. Simultaneous with the assault crossing by boat one platoon of Co A was to construct a footbridge just above the crossing point at Site #1; another platoon of the company was to perform a similar mission at Site #2. The 3d Plat of Co A was to construct the assault bridge at Site #3.

During the two days preceding the attack the engineers moved forward to advance CP's and worked to get their materials into final assembly areas. On the night of the 5th the forward CP of the Bn moved to BETTENDORF (910430). Cos A and C also had their operational CP's in the town. B Co moved to KLEINREISDORF (942422). During the night of 5-6 February the company moved its assault boats

and paddles from the initial assembly area in the woods southeast of HOESDORF (943431) into buildings in the town, the final assembly area. Additional boats were brought into HOESDORF during the night of 6-7 Feb. Co C moved some of its boats into the final assembly area (947428), a patch of woods overlooking the river, on the night of 5-6 Feb; additional boats were added the following night. The foot-bridge equipment of A Co was moved into these same two final assembly areas on the night of 5-6 Feb. Since much of the bridge equipment and some of the boats had to be hand carried into position in the final assembly areas and because engineer personnel for the job was limited, the infantry regiment supplied infantrymen to assist the engineers. On 6 Feb C Co, 179th Engr Bn, was attached to the 150th as a tactical reserve. The company had its CP with that of the 150th Engr Bn in BETTENDORF and one of its platoons was in BETTENDORF for use as immediate reserve. The final assembly areas were within range of enemy mortar and artillery fire previous to the attack; consequently some equipment was damaged before the operation began. Nevertheless when it came time for the jump off the engineers felt ready to perform their mission.

At 0300 on the 7th the initial assault waves put their boats in the OUR River at the respective sites to cross as planned, the infantry having carried the assault boats from the final assembly areas. From the beginning enemy fire was heavy and hampered the operations. Natural obstacles, however, caused the most trouble. It was extremely dark; the river banks were steep and extremely muddy and slippery. These factors made reaching the river a problem. Once the boats were in the water the problem was considerably aggravated. The stream was swollen because of recent rains and it was flowing at a rate of 10 to 12 miles per hour. There had been no time previous to the attack for rehearsal and the crews were not adept enough in handling the assault boats in the racing torrent. Many of the boats capsized

and others got across the stream only after drifting down below the crossing. All the while enemy fire was being placed on the crossing site, damaging boats and wounding personnel. It was soon discovered that three engineers couldn't handle the boats in the stream and return them to pick up more infantrymen; consequently many were beached on the far shore. Some of the engineers took cover in the enemy territory; others braved the river and attempted to swim back to the near side. At Site #1 ferrying continued in spite of the obstacles. By 1500 on the 7th C Co had crossed the 1st Bn 319th. After crossing the battalion, the ferrying continued during the night of 7-8 Feb; supplies were carried over and wounded evacuated. At Site #2 Co B got Co E/319th and part of F across by daylight then had to cease operations because of heavy enemy fire from small arms, nebelwerfer and artillery. Throughout the 7th Co B was pinned down in the basements in HOESDORF. Operations were resumed at Site #2 after darkness on the 7th but enemy fire was still heavy and little was accomplished. Only 27 men ^{moved} were~~across~~, but some supplies were ferried over and a number of prisoners and wounded evacuated to the near shore.

If the companies manning the assault boats encountered trouble, A Co fared even worse in attempting to put in the footbridges. Its platoons moved down at the respective crossing sites with the first assault waves and attempted to perform the initial step in the construction of a footbridge, the getting of a cable across the stream and mooring it on the far side -- this being necessary in order to hold the bridge with bridle lines. Getting a cable across proved to be a real task because of the swollen stream and the violent current. At Site #1 every proven method and many improvised means were used to try to get the cable across, and finally one was anchored on the far shore. This cable had hardly been established when it had to be cut. Assault boats and debris from the crossing at Site #2 came down the river and jammed into the cable. The boats were capsized, men drowned; there was an

entangled mass whipped by the rushing stream. Such a situation made it necessary to cut the cable. After the initial assault waves had got across the river and the river was free of some of the debris, efforts were renewed to get another cable across. The men worked throughout the 7th and the night of 7-8. One 3/4 inch rope was taken across but was broken away from its mooring by the swift current and miscellaneous materiel that drifted into the rope from above. At Site #2 the engineers were unable to get a cable across the first morning before daylight. The troops resumed operations with darkness on the 7th, and succeeded in getting a cable across. The 2d Plat Co A was relieved by a platoon of Co C 179th Engr that continued at the work. About a third of the footbridge was completed when pressure from the current of the stream broke the bridge apart. The segments of the bridge drifted downstream and added to the general confusion at Site #1. Thus no footbridges were established at either site. By this time, however, the assault battalion had largely been moved across by assault boats.

The platoon of Co A which was to build the infantry support bridge at Site #3 was never able to reach the position because of enemy fire. The 319th Inf abandoned the bridge prospect since they were unable to immediately clear the small arms fire.

On the night of 8-9 Feb two platoons of Co B attempted to cross the 3d Bn 319th at Site #3 with pneumatic floats. This was unsuccessful because of enemy artillery concentrations placed on the crossing point, direct artillery and small arms fire. Nine of twelve pneumatic floats were destroyed before reaching the site; only one got in the water.

On the afternoon of the 9th the 150th was assigned the mission of putting in a floating treadway across the SAUER River just below the blown bridge at DILLINGEN. The initial reconnaissance of the site was attempted by Capt James G McCann, 1st

Wendel F Helstrom and 1st Lt Jahn W Sparling. This party was unable to reach the bridge site but did view it from an overlooking wooded area. After dark Lt Sparling made another reconnaissance. He was able to get to the site and obtain the desired information. The same night the first serial of the bridge column, two platoons, moved into DILLINGEN with seven trucks. Troops were pinned down by enemy artillery fire the night of the 9th and all day the 10th. The first float was placed in the river at 0100 on the 11th. Work continued amidst sporadic artillery fire during the 11th but progress was slowed because of technical difficulties. The swift stream made necessary the use of extra material. When the bridge was finally completed at midnight on the night of the 12th it had 20 guy cables holding it in place against the current. The approach to the bridge on the near side was constructed out of rubble obtained from two houses blown up near the bridge site. A similar expedient was resorted to for the approach on the far side. The treadway was open for traffic at daybreak on the 13th; it was 312 feet long when completed.

The assault crossings and the bridging operations in the face of the SIEGFRIED Line were costly to the battalion. Much materiel was destroyed, damaged, or lost. The battalion suffered 79 casualties, 30 of which were treated locally; the remaining 49 were evacuated. Included in the casualty figures were 4 missing in action. Eight officers were wounded--of the eight five were evacuated. The CO, Lt Col Bruce W Reagan, was lightly wounded.

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