

The Moselle Operation  
The Bridging of the Moselle River By the  
80 th Infantry Division ( Notes)

The following story is the result of interviews held at the CP of the 317th Inf. Regt., which was commanded during the operation by ~~1st~~ Col. A.D. Cameron. The bulk of the story is the result of many interviews on successive days with Major J.D. Hayes, commanding the 2d. Bn of the regiment. Major was at the time of the operation in question the S-2 of the ~~2d Bn~~. This is Major Hayes' story.

317 INF REGT

On the 4th of September, the regimental CP was located in the vicinity of (1 MILE NE BEAUMONT). We had just completed operations in the vicinity of Rambucourt-Apremont-Montsec in our eastward drive to the river per Corps order. On this date the Regimental CO approached his S-2.

(Major Hayes) "Colonel Cameron, at about 0900, came to me and said: that he thought that we were going to cross the river, and, although the order had not come through, he did not wish to be caught unprepared in the event that we got started soon. He said 'Let's start making plans now.'"

Major Hayes was instructed to pick two reconnaissance patrols, to consist of one platoon each, for a recon of the river. They were to use the Flirey-Pont-a-Mousson road as a boundary. The 1st Bn patrols were to use the line Pont-a-Mousson to Dieulouard inclusive in recon for a possible point for crossing. The patrols of the 2d Bn were to use the line Pagny-sur-Moselle to Pont-a-Mousson exclusive for their recon for a possible crossing.

The patrols moved out at 1100 4 Sept, one patrol located at the town of Montauville, the other located at Jezainville. The results of these patrol recons revealed possible crossing points at Pagny, at points south of Vandieres, and near Dieulouard. However, it was ascertained that all points were in clear observation of the enemy. The ground was found to be a plateau from Flirey to the woods, Bois-dit-la-Lampe. The Germans could observe all activity on our side of the Moselle. A fording place was found in the Vicinity of Pagny at (75.3-44.3). Pont-a-Mousson was being interdicted by the Germans.

The 2d Bn. was directed to move up from Flirey and establish a second defensive position along the forward (East) edge of the Bois-dit-la-Lampe, west of Mamey, at 1300 4 Sept. They were to move as far forward as possible without being observed from Mousson Hill. At 1000 a regimental CP had been established at (75.2-33.6). As the 1st Bn moved up, the enemy interdicted the Flirey--Pont-a-Mousson road (71.2-34.1) and shells began to fall at a rate of one per 10 minutes.

Col. Cameron, who had been called to the Division CP for a conference, returned at 1700.

(Major Hayes) "Colonel Cameron said that we would cross the river. Plans would be made accordingly. At 1700 the air officer reported. We were promised air support. We were promised an artillery concentration on Mousson Hill--- on call. The air was to be in three waves. The planes were to strafe and bombing Mousson and Hill 365 by 0830 (on the 5th, the date was announced at a different time). The bombing was to stop by 0930, when the rear areas would start receiving the same treatment." (Arty was to be 0900-0930)

It was now reported that there was a possible ford at (78.0-32.9), which was opposite Blenod-les-Pont-a-Mousson. There was also another fording place located north of Pagny. ~~At~~ Col. Cameron decided to let the 1st Bn make its crossing at Blenod, while the 2d Bn was to cross at Pagny at their discretion.

A verbal order, followed by a written field order, was issued to the units concerned, at 2100 4 Sept. Meanwhile plans were made with definite objectives for each battalion. The field order in effect directed:

1st Bn to move to an assembly area in the Forêt de Puvenalle at (72.5-32.0), the move to be made under cover of darkness.

2d Bn was directed to an assembly area in the Bois de Villers at (70.5-41.5).

3rd Bn to move to an assembly area in Bois-dit-la-Lampe.

The general plan was :

The 2d Bn was to jump off across canal and river, fording, at Pagny move due east . up hill 385, turn south and move along the ridge line through the woods to the south down to hill 365, west of Lesmenils. Hill 365 was the objective.

1. The 1st Bn was to jump off at the same moment (1000 5 Sept) , moving east through Jezainville , enter Blenod, approach the canal, cross and take assault boats across the river at (78.0-32.9), pass south of Atton into the Forêt de Facq , attacking their objective, Mousson Hill, from the Forêt.

The 3rd Bn would follow and support the leading battalion at Blenod.

( Major Hayes states that the 1st Bn had at least 6 assault boats.)

Statements are confused , but it seems that all agree that the 2d Bn was out of communication at this time, and that the word of this attack reached the battalion at 0300 5 Sept.

At 0700, on the morning of the 5th, ~~At~~ Col. Cameron decided that the attack would jump off at 0930 instead of at 1000 . A staff officer was sent to the 1st Bn with this message. (Maj. Hayes was this officer.)

Meanwhile , the 1st Bn had started its move , according to plan, down into Jezainville and into Blenod. It was a beautiful day. Visibility was good, and the temperature was about 70 degrees . Major Hayes arrived at Blenod at about 0845 , and the battalion moved in , shielded by the houses, by 0900. At this time an artillery concentration was due . These fires were not given ( result of interrogation of personnel). At 0915, ~~Brigadier~~ General Surbee came into Blenod. General Surbee was Division Artillery Commander. ( later killed in action) General Surbee said that there would be no artillery concentration. ( See statement elsewhere). The air support which was to rake Mousson Hill did not come at all. Investigation proved that the planes were grounded by rain at their base.

*In accord with*  
According to the new plan, the 1st Bn jumped off at 0930, crossed the canal at Blenod by a partially demolished foot bridge, in the order of Companies B, A, and C with attachments. Lt Spalding led the attack with a recon element. The battalion CP remained in a factory yard at Blenod.

( Major Hayes) " The battalion crossed the canal , and at approximately 1000 were between canal and the river. They moved about two-hundred yards. Then enemy machinegun fire from the other side of the river caught them. ( These guns, as nearly as can be determined were located southwest of Atton, on 1:50000 map , 78.5-33.0, at A-1 as shown on diagram.) The first burst got eight men in Company B . This halted action for thirty minutes. The field was bare, and the fire was accurate. By 1030, Company B had reorganized and started to move forward with 2 platoons to reach the river. However, at 1015 , enemy artillery of about 150 mm caliber had started falling on their position between the canal and the river. At this time, General Surbee, who was observing from ( 1:50000 77.3-33.0) called for smoke on Mousson Hill. This smoke stopped the enemy artillery fire."The men were trying to get the boats started, when mortar fire from the vicinity of Atton ( at 1055) got five boats.

( Maj. Hayes) " The first round was red smoke. Then there followed a terrific concentration. "

Meanwhile telephone lines were run up to the OP of the Regimental CO and tied back to the regiment, while the machinegun platoon of Company D set up at ( 1:50000 77.2-33.1 ) The other platoon moved up to support Company B.

At this time the 1st battalion had available the 313 Arty Bn and one medium battalion. The 512th FA Bn and the Cannon Company were in direct support of the 2d Bn.

( Maj. Hayes) " The 2d Bn never got off. . At about 1300 5 Sept, when Colonel Cameron and I returned to the CP at (1:100000 76.1-36.8), Col. Fisher told him that General McBride had come and had given a verbal order to have the Third battalion moved intact to try a crossing at Pont-a-Mousson near (1:100000 76.1-36.8) by ford or any available means,"

By 1600, the 3rd Bn had not gotten started. They could not find a ford. When they had reached the designated point , they had been forced to take up defensive positions against enemy fire from the other side of the river.

By 1500, the 1st Bn had pulled back to the canal line at Blenod. They dug in there with companies A and B. Company C was back in the town .

At 1500 , Colonel Cameron and Major Hayes gave the verbal order to Lt. Col. Norman , CO 1st Bn, to cross the river that night ( 2200 5th). Lt. Col. Roberts of the 3rd Bn. was instructed to cross , and two recon patrols were sent out North of Pagny to see if a suitable place could be found. There was still no contact with the 2d Bn. ( See 2d Bn report) The objectives were: 3rd. Bn Mousson Hill; 2d Bn. same objective , hill 365, coming down the ridge line.

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Details of the second unsuccessful attempt, on the same date, follow in another interview. Title: 317 th Inf Regt Continued- Assault Boat Crossing.