

Paris

UNIT: 2nd Bn, 317th Inf Regt, 80th Division

PERIOD: 8 Nov - 10 Nov 44

ACTION: Seille River Crossing at MORVILLE-SUR-SEILLE, France (See 317th Inf, LORRAINE Campaign interview also included in this series.)

SOURCE: Major James H. Hayes, then CO, 2nd Bn, 317th Inf, now CO 1st Bn, 317th Inf

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: FUSSEN, Germany, 1st Bn, 317th Inf CP, 20 Jun 45

INTERVIEWER: Capt James J. Cowen

MAPS: 1/50,000	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>SHEET NO.</u>	<u>GCS NO.</u>
	NOMENY	34-14	4471
	METZ	34-13	471

NOTE: No records were used during the interview.

On the morning of 8 Nov 1944, when the 80th Division jumped off across the Seille River during the LORRAINE Campaign, the 317th Inf was on the Division's and XII Corps' left flank. The 2nd Bn, which was to pass into the 317th's regimental reserve as soon as the 1st and 3d Battalions jumped off, was holding the regimental line running along the Seille River between MORVILLE-SUR-SEILLE (8436) exclusive to CLEMENY (8634) inclusive. The 1st Bn, 317th, was on the right and the 3d Bn, 317th, on the left.

While holding the river line the 2d Bn had F Co on the left, G Co on the right and E Co in reserve. Maj Hayes said that the 2d Bn had all the heavy machine guns he could make available plus four 50 caliber machine guns emplaced at a point (846362) firing across the river to the east in support of the crossing of the 1st Bn. This supporting machine gun fire continued from 0600 to 0615 8 Nov 44. Some of this same fire also was placed on EPLY (8637) and on the road running southwest out of EPLY. After this fire was lifted, the 2nd Bn went into regimental reserve, assembling to the rear at a point (818352).

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At 0800, Maj Hayes reconnoitered for a crossing over the Seille. He found an engineer footbridge and also saw that the 3d Bn, which the 2d Bn was to follow, was involved in a fire fight. He then went back to the regimental CP where he received orders to follow as soon as the 3d Bn was clear of the river.

At 1025, the 2d Bn began the crossing. The route was through the main road to MORVILLE and then across. During the crossing about ten rounds of artillery fell in the vicinity but no casualties resulted. The order was G Co first, followed by F and then E Companies. Maj Hayes recalled that the footbridge that the engineers had constructed had spanned the water of the Seille completely when first put in, but because of continuous rain, the river had swollen to about 200 yards wide at that point. So it was necessary to wade about 100 yards through waist deep water to get to the 30 yard bridge and then wade another 100 yards to get to high ground on the other side. The current also was abnormally swift, Hayes remembers.

The 2d Bn found the east bank of the river, the area just north of EPLY and a point at (851367) mined. But they knew of these fields ahead of time and took care of them without suffering casualties. Two weeks before, a 13 man patrol had had six men seriously wounded in these locations, but all 13 had managed to return to friendly lines with detailed information.

Upon crossing, G Co had the mission of taking Hill 237 at (855378), F Co was to take EPLY and E Co was to take Hill 244 (851381).

Because of the condition of the river it took G Co, the first company in line, 35 minutes to clear in single file. At 1130m while waiting for the other companies to come abreast, G Co received a heavy enemy artillery barrage in their assembly area. The fire was believed to come from the direction of LEUVIGNY (8641). Eighteen casualties were suffered, including five dead. One round hit right in the midst of a mortar crew in the act of setting up their

weapon, killing two and injuring three.

At 1230, F Co completed its crossing and went for EPLY, which had been bypassed by the leading battalions. There 22 prisoners were taken. Three Germans were killed and six taken prisoner from the 1531st Fortress Machine Gun Co manned mainly by Polish soldiers. The town was cleaned out of enemy by 1500 without sustaining any casualties.

At that time, F Co went into battalion reserve. But the Co CO, according to Maj Hayes, misunderstood orders and dug in on the forward slope of Hill 237 and was also heavily shelled, suffering 20 casualties. The CO, the FO and a platoon leader all were killed and Maj Hayes, seeing the vulnerable position they were taking, was lightly wounded (not evacuated) in trying to get them on foot to change their position.

Hayes countered by putting TOT on HAUT-DE-MOINCE (864390) and also on the area around CHEMINOT (8340), after which the enemy artillery slackened considerably.

In the meantime, Co E crossed last over the bridge, clearing by 1315 and went into position alongside Co G. Both attacked and took their objectives, Hills 237 and 234, with little difficulty.

(Hayes also recalled one other obstacle that presented itself during the crossing. While one of the companies was at midstream of the river, six ME-109's tried to strafe the area around the bridge, but the enemy planes were driven off by ack-ack without causing any damage.)

The 2nd Bn dug in for the night on Hill 237 (855377). At the time they were worried about their exposed north flank. The 5th Division, XX Corps, which was to advance abreast of the 80th Division, in XII Corps, was not to jump across the Sille until the next day. Consequently, any enemy units that might be in the CHEMINOT region were constituted a definite counter-attack threat from the north.

Just at dusk, the Germans, assembled in about company strength at a point (860383), attacked across the 2d Bn's front in the direction of the 3d Bn. Apparently the enemy forces did not realize the presence of the 2d Bn, Maj Hayes stated, for in striking as they did, they exposed their entire right flank. As a result, the 317th had an easy job of breaking up the attack before it really started, and inflicted a high percentage of casualties by bringing down all the artillery they could call for on the assembly position. In addition, mortar fire from both the 2d and 3d battalions was placed on the Germans as well as direct fire from the tanks of Co A, 702d Tk Bn. No further attacks were attempted by the enemy that night.

The 2d Bn suffered considerably from exposure, however, Rain commenced shortly after dark and the men had to give up digging foxholes because it was drier out than in. Consequently, the men stayed out in the rain all night without any cover. It was not until about 0300 the morning of 9 Nov that treadway bridges were established across the Seille and the AT guns and the aid station could get over to the 2d Bn. The aid station was given priority in moving across because of the casualties suffered that day, but despite the priority, two men died of shock because of inadequate medical treatment while waiting for the medics in a house in EPLY. No blankets had been received from the rear up until that time.

At 0700, 9 Nov, Col Lewis, CO, 317th Inf, was told to take Hill 235 (870378) and continue the original mission of advancing to the northeast. Shortly after moving out at 0800, Maj Hayes recalls that four factors entered into the picture that really raised the morale of his men. (1) The sun came out for the first time in what seemed like days. (2) The ren troops of the 6th Armored, with both armored cars and light tanks showed up as support and possibly relief. (3) A great wave of B-17's flew over. (4) Elements of the 5th Div were contacted on the left

marking the end of their fears of having an exposed left flank.

The 2d Bn had little trouble gaining Hill 235, but as they did they could see Kraut infantrymen on HAUTE-DE-MOINCE. The enemy didn't fire on the 2d Bn, however, because apparently they had their defensive set-up established to try to stop the 5th Div striking from the west. Physical contact between the 5th Div and the 2d Bn then was made by a patrol which was sent out to make the link-up in the vicinity of PREY FARM () at 1000. At 1400, the patrol returned, having accomplished their mission.

The 2d Bn then moved to a point (883386) just north of RAUCOURT (8938), where they saw light tanks of the 6th Armored Div's arch elements get hit. One tank burned, and the others in deploying to gain interval, bogged down. They managed to pull out of the area without further damage, however. Medium tanks of the 6th also attempted to cut through on the RAUCOURT road running to ST. JURE (8940) but were stopped by enemy artillery.

Late in the afternoon, E Co, 2d Bn, was ordered to take ST. JURE which they did by 1800. Both the 1st and 3d Bns had by-passed ST. JURE in their advance. Sixty prisoners were taken who showed little inclination to fight following the sight of the wave of advancing Americans and the effect of artillery barrages on the town. Co E casualties were extremely light during the ST. JURE operation.

At that time both the regimental and battalion CP's were located in RAUCOURT, Cpl Lewis, 317th CO, had planned to send the 3d Bn to take Hill 243 (912394), but because it was dark by the time ST. JURE was in their hands, Lewis called off their next mission.

The next day, 10 No 44, the 2d Bn passed through the 3d Bn in the vicinity of Hill 243 (912394) and came abreast of the leading 1st Bn which had gotten some 4000 yards ahead when the 3d Bn, by now badly riddled, was held up.

It was while the 2d Bn was moving forward to come abreast of the 1st Bn

that an odd occurrence took place very definitely affecting the choice of missions of the two battalions the next day, 11 Nov.

The 3d Bn had been on the 1st Bn's left since the jump-off three days before. But when the 2d Bn caught the 1st, they found they were on the 1st Bn's right. Because of this switch in zone, the 1st Bn caught the HAN-SUR-NIED mission, the most critical and important of the entire LORRAINE Campaign, rather than the 2d. (See 317th Inf interview and Co A, 1st Bn, 317th, interview, also included in this section.)

On the 10th of Nov, Maj Hayes was evacuated because of pneumonia, leaving with the knowledge that the Seille River bridgehead was firmly established, that the 80th Division was firmly tied in with the 5th Div on the left and that the enemy was on the run.

Hayes, a youthful leader (West Point '42) who radiated confidence and great interest in his troops, made some interesting statements regarding trench foot, a condition that caused more than its share of casualties during the LORRAINE Campaign. He stated that if commanders are in a position to control the problem, it is easily solved, but it is when they can exercise no control that the problem gets out of hand, as it did during this action.

When the bn hit the Seille, they were forced to wade through waist deep water. Hence, even though most of them had overshoes, their shoes and socks were soaked from the beginning and up until the time he was evacuated, three days later, no one had the slightest chance to get out of the mud or get under cover. No one had a chance to change even their socks let alone put on another pair of shoes.

Hayes also pointed out that the weather was just about the same during the month of October, cold and rainy, during the 80th's operations around MT. ST. JEAN, but there they had a chance to pull the men out of the line and under cover where they

could dry their feet, rub them to regain circulation, etc., and prevent trench foot from causing evacuation.