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UNIT: 1st Bn, 319th Inf Regt

PERIOD: 7-28 Feb 1945

ACTION: Crossing of SAUER River

SOURCE: Maj Arthur H Clark

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: PHILLIPSWEILER, GERMANY, 2 March 1945

MAPS: GSGC 4414, 6103, 6003; 1/25,000

INTERVIEWER: T Sgt C J Angulo

The regimental plan for the crossing of the SAUER River on 7 Feb envisaged two sites at which crossings were to be forced. One attempt was to be made at HOESDORF (9343) by the 2d Bn, another about 1000 yards from the junction of the OUR and SURE Rivers. The 2d Bn, on crossing, was to proceed up the overlooking ridge and occupy this dominating terrain. Similarly, the 1st Bn was to secure the high ground before daylight, and then when darkness had lifted to work back towards the river clearing pillboxes along the way. H-hour was set for 0300 preceded by a 45-minute artillery preparation.

Prior to the attack the sole reconnaissance consisted of a small patrol which the night of the 6th walked along the river between HOESDORF and WALLENDORF (9642) in search of a satisfactory crossing site. On the 6th daylight reconnaissance was prevented by enemy fire from the cliffs overlooking the river.

In the artillery preparation that preceded the jump-off, artillery, small arms, and rocket-firing tanks participated. In addition .50 caliber multiples also supported the attack. The 3d Bn in linear formation along the ridge separating the SURE and OUR Rivers fired small arms to assist the initial bombardment. The primary aim of the preparation was to confuse the enemy as to the actual crossing site rather than to destroy his installations.

10 The 1st Bn CP was located at KLEINREISDORF (9442) before the attack. Notification of the impending crossing was received at 1300 on the 6th. Thirty-four

assault boats were allotted to the battalion for the crossing. Each boat, containing a load of 9 infantrymen was to be manned by a crew of three engineers. Each infantryman was well-supplied with ammunition, carrying in addition to a full belt, three bandoliers of .30 cal. Both the A and P Plat and the AT Plat were employed as ammunition bearers. Extra loads of bazooka, mortar and .30 cal. were carried. Two ~~aid~~ <sup>medic</sup> technicians were with the assault troops. Since it was expected that there would be a 24-hour interval before the construction of a bridge an extra artillery radio was brought along.

At 0300 the infantry, having picked up the boats at a forward assembly area (47428) and commenced crossing at 051430. C Co led, followed by B Co. A considerable number of boats were lost in the assault crossing. By 0700 Cos B and C, each with a machine gun platoon attached, and the command group were across, and only three or four boats remained. Co A suffered 40 casualties on the first day without having reached the river. The swift current, 8-10 miles per hour, impeded operations.

The enemy concentrated most of his available strength on the crossing of the 2d Bn at HOESDORF. In the 1st Bn sector at daylight the enemy opened up with observed fire. The Germans fought from outside of their pillboxes utilizing their communication trenches for this purpose.

The terrain of the far side was characteristic of the SAUER valley. From the river to the road was flat flood plane. On the other side of the road was a steep 40-foot bank which *tapered* off at the top. Then a 200-foot cliff, almost vertical, walled in the area.

Cos B and C were momentarily pinned between the river and the road, some seeking east along the road behind the embankment. However with the increasing mortar and artillery fire it became evident that to hold while pinned was impossible. The only line of action was to storm the cliff and eliminate the pillboxes that lined the cliff and commanded the valley with fire and observation. The machine guns were set up along the river to fire in support. The companies rushed the hill and

initially captured 3 or 4 pillboxes.

On reaching what had appeared as the crest the infantrymen dug in. However, from a second rise about 50 feet beyond waves of Germans advanced to oust the infantrymen from their dug in positions. These attempts on the part of the enemy were unsuccessful. By 1800 Co A had crossed and captured WALLENDORF (9642). The night of the 7th, therefore, the Bn was disposed as follows: Co A was in WALLENDORF; Cos B and C were extended along the ridge, and the 81mm mortars were positioned at KLEINREISDORF. Between the town of WALLENDORF and the companies on the ridge was a gap covered only by the Bn CP located in a pillbox near the river.

The second day of the operation, the 8th, the Bn mission was to clear the entire ridgeline, thereby eliminating direct observation on the site for the proposed bridge. Co A was directed to move uphill from WALLENDORF, but was pinned by cross-fire from mutually supporting pillboxes. The census was 25 casualties.

*(See insert - next page)*

By the 9th, the supply situation was becoming critical. The men had carried B units of K rations, sufficient for one day. Also ammunition was low. To alleviate this condition the liaison planes from division dropped ammunition and medical supplies, of which 80 per cent landed in the Bn area. After three days fighting the average company strength was 80 fighting men. For the first four days the right flank was wide open, the 318th Inf finally occupying BIESDORF on the 10th. The 81s positioned behind the crest of the ridge south of the OUR fired concentrations on each pillbox to be assaulted.

On the 11th WALLENDORF was cleared for the third time, the enemy continually seeping back into the town. By this time the ridge was clear and the high ground beyond secured. This day, 11th, Co F returned to the 2d Bn. G Co likewise reverted to 2d Bn control but remained in position on the left flank of the 1st Bn.

The night of the 11th a ponton treadway was in just west of WALLENDORF by which the 3d Bn crossed. The total casualties for the operation were over 200.

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Company B advanced through an area studded with pillboxes which were by-passed, to occupy a piece of high ground (930440). This by-passing maneuver cost the company 30 casualties. Once on the high ground the company dug in. Actually the men were cut off from the rest of the battalion.

This same day a pillbox 150 yards from the battalion was located and neutralized. Also a pillbox along the ridge housed an artillery observer who directed intense nebelwerfer and artillery fire at the slightest movement. In the crossing bangalore torpedos, satchel charges, and flamethrower equipment were wet.

On the third day, 9th, F and G Cos from the 3d Bn were attached. Moving down the river road from opposite the town of HOESLOFF, Co G took over C Co's position, and C went out to join B Co. This took place the night of the 9-10. The following day, 10th, C Co and A Co continued to work along the ridge clearing pillboxes.

The 2d Bn took NIEDERSGEGEN (9346) and the 3d Bn occupied the high ground beyond. On the 19th, the 1st Bn was located at KEMMIG (9646). The following morning the mission was received to take the towns of OBERSGEGEN (9349) and KORPERICH (9448). The attack was launched in column of companies along the ridge-line northward from KEMMIG. A Co led, followed by C and B in that order.

B Co turned west, descended down the ridge across the valley north of OBERSGEGEN and set up a defensive position on the high ground west of the town. C occupied a blocking position north of the town while A pooled off and attacked the town. All routes of escape for the enemy were cut off by fire. Two hundred PWs were captured. Enemy equipment secured included 4 88s, 3 75s, a 150 How, and several 120 mortars. A half hour preparation preceded the attack.

The 2d Bn sent a company to occupy SEILERICH (9447). Contact was established between the 1st and 2d Bns. On the 20th the 1st Bn moved to GEICHINGEN (9451) as flank protection for the regiment. The following day, 21st, the 2d Bn proceeded to the same town. Enemy resistance was negligible in GEICHINGEN, but stronger just beyond.

On the 21st the Bn had been informed that 000 was attached to the division and was moving to an assembly area in the general vicinity of GEICHINGEN. This same day a roadblock defended by 2 Tiger tanks was eliminated by the 2d and 3d Bns.

The armor passed through the regiment with the elimination of the roadblock. The 1st Bn motorized two companies to protect left flank. Held in this position.