

MOSELLE CROSSING 702nd Tank Bn

Interview with Lt Col Ralph Talbot, CO 702nd Tk Bn:

Previous to the crossing of the 12th the 702nd was at CH LONS replacing engines and tracks. After an overnight march the battalion arrived near FLIREY. At that time the 80th Div was fighting in three separate sections. One section from DIEULOUARD to include MARBACHE, MARBACHE to POMPEY exclusive, and POMPEY to TOUL. After these areas to the West of the river were clear of enemy preparations were made for the crossing.

It was essential to cross the tanks as soon as possible after the initial assault by the infantry. However the muddy river bottom precluded fording the tanks. The crossing were to take place near DIEULOUARD where the river forms two arms embracing an island. Although it was possible to ford the first arm, it was impossible to determine the fordability of the far arm until the engineers had made a thorough reconnaissance of that arm. A possible ford was located after the infantry had made the assault, but after an attempt to ford an armored dozer at the likely location had failed, it was decided to build a heavy ponton over the far arm as well as over the canal and the near branch.

Originally it had been planned to cross each tk co with the CT to which it was attached. However since the tanks had to wait for the completion of the three heavy ponton bridges, plans were altered and A Co and B Co crossed after the two CTs.

A Co was attached to the 317th CT and B Co to the 318th CT. C Co was operating with the 319th CT vic of TOUL and D Co was with the Div Rcn Troop.

The crossing took place with the normal difficulties but no losses. Intermittent shelling was in process from the enemy-held heights and once traffic was held up a few minutes because of a hit on bridge.

On arrival at the far side each co reported to the proper CT and was ordered to take up a position. Co A proceeded to the high ground South of ST GENEVIEVE, Co B just North of LE PONT DE MONS on the road to LOISY (797-295) (PONT A MOUSON 1:50,000)

At 0400 on the morning of the 13th the en counterattacked and drove the infantry and Co A, 702nd temporarily off the hills. The German infantry and tanks drove the Americans to within 100 yards of the bridge. The CP of the 318th CT was overrun and the regimental CO and two of his staff were wounded. The B Co tanks in position opened up. This tank fire from set locations by itself repelled the counterattack. Captured German artillery observers attribute the failure of the counterattack to the direct fire from the American tanks coupled with the fact that a lucky hit by damaging their antenna put the en observers out of contact with their arty. The Germans, according to these PWs, did not bring up reinforcements immediately after the crossing. On the afternoon of the 13th CCA, 4th Armd, passed through the bridgehead.

The other operations of the 702nd consist of small engagements intended to enlarge the bridgehead.

The terrain in this area is bad from the point of view of tankmen. The hills are too steep.

The weather has been satisfactory and the tanks have not been roadbound. The Germans had the roads and other natural approaches well zeroed in, and for that reason the tanks moved cross-country as often as terrain permitted.

Quite a few mine casualties. Fields becoming more deliberate.

Only seen two 88s, mostly "souped up" 75s and small stuff.