

MOSELLE CROSSING 702nd Tank Battalion

Interview with Capt Francis McDermott, CO Co A.

The mission of Co A was to support the 317th Inf. At 2000, the 12th, this company commenced crossing the bridges built by the 1117th C Engrs Group. At that time it was supposed that the infantry had secured the hills just East of the river (Hill 380 and the hill just S of Hill 380). The 1st platoon under Lt Atkins occupied the hill to the right (S of Hill 380), and the 2nd platoon led by Lt Croxton took up a position in a patch of woods SW of ST GENEVIEVE, (804-303). The 3rd Platoon together with Capt McDermott was located along the West side of the ST GENEVIEVE-BEZAUMONT road South of some ruins (809-299).

After contacting Major Burnett, Capt McDermott was told to find a position. It was dark. Battalion guides had met each platoon at the bridge and had led each into position. The 1st and 2nd platoons were put on outpost without infantry.

The 3rd platoon tanks were positioned close to each other with guns pointing in the direction of BEZAUMONT.

During the early morning of the 13th some of the infantry apparently pulled out. The 3rd Platoon set up its own security. At about 0430 hell broke loose. The Germans were within talking distance. The men tried to avoid being discovered. The tanks however came from the direction of ST GENEVIEVE.

It seemed that the infantry lines were too thin. Also the infantry were positioned on the forward slope of Hill 380 and the tanks on the reverse slopes. The German counterattack issued from the direction of ST GENEVIEVE effectively separated the infantry from the tanks.

The men of the 3rd Platoon could not see the enemy. In the meantime the infantry outposts came barreling over the hill down toward the river. The men from the tank platoon on security pulled back. One of them, Wishnefsky by name, gave the alarm to the CO, jumped on Capt McDermott's tank, but was carried off by barbed wire. Jumping on another tank, he made his getaway. The tanks highballed down the hill to the river. The next morning at daybreak defensive lines were formed at the bottom of the hill. It is worthy of note that Lt Croxton's platoon off to the West of the BEZAUMONT-ST GENEVIEVE road was unaware of the counterattack until the morning when it joined with the rest of the Co in the counterattack up the hill.

A line was formed at the base of Hill 380. The infantry was to follow the tanks up the hill. A colonel from the 317th (name unknown, possibly Exec O) threatened to shoot any infantrymen falling back. The colonel and Capt McDermott tried to form a group of infantry to follow the tanks but their efforts were unavailing.

At the bottom of the hill Sgt Murray and the CO jumped off their tanks and proceeded to orient themselves with the terrain. They were unfamiliar with the ground. While they were going through the process of estimating the ground in relation to the employment of tanks, a hail of machinegun fire drove them into foxholes and a ditch. At their first opportunity they got back to their tanks. The 1st platoon on the hill South of Hill 380 was sent for. The 3rd and 1st platoons started out up the hill in staggered line formation slowly negotiating the incline. No infantry accompanied the tanks. On the way up the hill contact was made with the 2nd Platoon. On the way up the hill fire was being received from our own men from the rear, and from the enemy to the left and front.

About halfway up the hill the enemy fired smoke shells on the tanks but these did not delay. Sgt Murray's platoon swung to the right of the ruins, when the BEZAUMONT-ST GENEVIEVE road was reached. The rest continued up the hill.

Meanwhile a 4th Armored Reconnaissance unit moved through in the direction of NOMENY. This outfit was using the same channel (radio). The recon unit reported BEZAUMONT and VILLE AU VAL clear of enemy. As the unit from 4th Armored

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moved over the hill it received enemy fire. Census: 1 M6 and several armed cars.

At the ruins Sgt Murray bumped into two Germans. Killed both.

The rest of the company proceeded up hill, swung sharply to right, and moved in a staggered line southward along the gradual reverse slope of Hill 380 East of the BEZAUMONT-ST GENEVIEVE road in a turning movement on BEZAUMONT. The ground East of the road where the line turned to the right slopes gradually and is open. An additional feature was the existence of eight foot hedgerows bordering both sides of the road. To some extent the hedgerows masked the tanks from observation and fire from the direction of BEZAUMONT.

Capt McDermott was hit shortly after the company turned to the right.

*The Roman Temple
east of Villedieu?*