

MOSELLE CROSSING 1. 17 Engr Group

Notes on terrain from personal observation: The MOSELLE R in the vic of DIEULOUARD follows a winding course Northward through a flat flood-plain bordered on the East by a series of fairly steep heights which dominate the Western banks of the river. From these heights the Germans were able to obtain perfect observation of all activity on the opposite side.

The river itself in this area has a variable depth from six to eight feet and flows at approximately six to seven miles per hour. The bottom is for the most part muddy which makes fording perilous for vehicular traffic since the mud clings to the tracks. The average width is about one hundred and fifty feet.

Two characteristics of the river affected operations: the quick flow and the tendency of the water level to change overnight.

Along the western bank of the river there is a canal, fifty feet in width, six in depth. Between the river and the canal is an eight foot dyke similar in appearance to the hedgerows of NORMANDIE. This dyke rises abruptly from the canal and river bottom. Because of the varying water level its banks and those of the canal and river are very muddy. In rainy weather the entire area becomes a veritable mire.

Opposite DIEULOUARD the river forms two arms which wind around a flat island several hundred yards wide at its widest point. Before operations there was one road across the island. Practically no cover <sup>with Co 1</sup>

Interview with Col Lovett, CO 1117 Engr Gr. The first crossing took place during daylight on 5 Sept. Parts of two inf cos were put across. However the crossing was not adequately supported and nearly all the inf was cut off and lost. It is known that ten wounded returned. 38 assault boats were lost in the operation. The Group did not take part in this crossing. The 305th Engr Bn, the organic engineers of the 80th guided the men through the foods and manned the assault boats. It was apparent that too much strength held the opposite bank. During daylight the enemy placed interdictory fire on all vehicles on the forward slopes of the Western side. The entire BOIS DE CUIITE was under hostile observation.

Then an attempt was made at night in force (12 Sept). The 80th had five battalions available. The original plan called for the 317th CT to cross just North of the island while the 318th CT (- 1 Bn) to cross at the island. Based on information received from a Frenchman fords were expected, many on the near arm, one on the far branch. It was planned to throw an infantry support bridge over the canal and improvised trestle bridges over both arms. The trestle bridges could carry C1 9 loads. These would be prefabricated in bivouac, carried to the sites in trucks, and put in as soon as no small arms fire. Later in the day the 557 Hvy Pon Bn would bridge the canal and both arms. This work was to go only after the sites were out of range of hostile artillery.

To support the crossing twenty 50 Cal and thirty 30 Cal machine guns were dug in along the forward slope of the BOIS DE CUIITE on the edge of the wood. During the two nights previous to the attack the infantry dug in and sited the guns which were manned by engineers. The positions were well camouflaged and had overhead cover also. These guns put up barrage fire while the infantry crossed in the assault.

At 0400 the infantry started crossing. Artillery opened up at 0415. The arty preparation was of an hour's duration.

The 305th ferried and guided one bn of the 317th across. Then this same outfit constructed an infantry foot bridge by which another bn crossed. Then a co of the 167th C Engr Bn constructed an Infantry Support Bridge across the canal and river.

As soon as the initial waves of inf reached the far bank the en opened up with machine pistols. However the en inf were too thin, too scattered to stop the crossing. However heavy arty and mortar fired on the supporting machine guns killing one and wounding a few.

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On the far bank two infantry set off some antipersonnel mines. Twenty were found. Later sixty more were found along the wire on the far bank.

By 0700 that afternoon the company of the 167th had completed its inf support bridge and towed TDs and ammo trucks were put across. Because of the losses in assault boats there were insufficient boats to complete the bridge to the far bank. However it was possible to ford the vehicles the remaining short distance.

As soon as the first bridge was put in across the canal at the island, a ford was found across the first branch, but no ford over the second arm. Gen McBride then ordered that the heavy ponton bridges be put up as soon as possible. The work started at 1000. Originally these heavy bridges were to be put up later in the day when it was expected there would be no more hostile arty fire on the river.

The ponton bridge across the canal was completed by 1300. The heavy bridge across the first arm by 1700, and by 1950 the far branch was bridged with a heavy ponton. These three successive bridges were put in under observed en fire.

By 0900 the inf had gained both heights on the Eastern side. However 24 hours after the assault at 0400, 13 Sept, the en launched a series of counterattacks with tanks and infantry from ST GENEVIEVE and LOISY and BEZAUMONT. Three cos of Engrs with machine guns set up a defense. This took place on three successive mornings. It was fortunate that the heavy ponton bridges were in before the first counterattack in view of the fact that the tanks of the 702nd Tk Bn were instrumental in stopping the en on the morning of the 13th.

On the night of the 12th it was decided to put in a heavy ponton North of the bridge across the far branch. The work on this bridge was done at night. The next morning twenty-five shells landed nearby. It had been hoped that the en would not notice this bridge. Later this bridge and the heavy across the canal were dismantled to provide material for the final bridge across the far arm to the South to take advantage of the macadam across the island.

Up to the 16th the weather was hot and dry, which facilitated the work. The site of the first ponton, the one across the canal was later bridged by a wooden ramp and fill. Nearby was a quantity of slack which was used as road material for building roads across the island.

The Germans had zeroed in on road junctions and established crossing points. Thus the island site although possessing inherent disadvantages of two crossings had the value of not being a likely crossing point.

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Interview with Major Brooks, Heavy Ponton Bn. The first bridge was started at 10 o'clock in the morning and completed by 1 that afternoon. The area was too close for speedy work. It was necessary to bulldoze through the dyke and steep banks. At the same time work was going on with the inf support bridge. This further confused work. Also the canal level had dropped 2 feet overnight. The soft banks forced the giving up of the idea of the trestle bridges.

No work could be done on bridging the first arm until the canal was crossed. It was impossible to get the equipment across the fill which the 305th had made at the established crossing point by pushing debris into the canal. The bridge across the first arm was completed by 1800.

As soon as the canal was bridged, the second bridge crossed the near arm and commenced work on the far arm. An attempt was made to ford the far arm with an armored dozer, which attempt failed. The third job was completed by 2000 that night.

That night it was decided to construct another ponton bridge across the far arm 300 yards downstream. The equipment was brought in after dark. By 0600 the morning of the 13th it was ready.

On the night of the 13th a fifth heavy ponton bridge was built at the end of the macadam road upstream. By this time it was thought safe to use that logical place since the en fire had diminished. To obtain the material for this bridge the heavy across the canal and the heavy downstream on the far arm were dismantled.

Interview with T/Sgt Lucas, Operations Sgt 557 Hvy Pont Bn. On the morning of the 12th Co A was at FLIREY, 6 miles from DIEULOUARD, and Co B at BOUCQ, 15 miles from DIEULOUARD. The CO of Co A and the Bn S-3 conducted reconnaissance. The en had perfect observation from the hills across the river into the town. The hostile arty would blast at anybody showing himself.

On the morning of the 12th Co A moved out and came into DIEULOUARD. Commenced work on canal bridge. While working sent back for Co B to move up. On completion of the canal bridge Co B crossed and forded the near arm. This ford was located below the Co A bridge across the near arm. Co B was clearing mines before the trucks but it was a time-consuming process. Co B decided to move forward anyway regardless of mines and start construction. By 8:45 that night traffic moving across the three bridges.

Next morning 1117th ordered reconnaissance for other side downstream from first Co B bridge. Was constructed and stood in 2 or 3 days.?

Interview with Major R.R. McCorkle, Exec O 248th Engr Bn, and Capt E.H. Cockrell. The 167th and 248th combined had 50 machine guns set up along the hill (BOIS DE CUITE) dug in previous day. Opened up to support the initial wave. Arty also opened up at 0415. When the machine guns ceased fire the en answered with arty, but the engr were so well dug in that there were few casualties. The machine guns were controlled by telephone at a centrally located point.

It had been planned that the 167th would throw a portable trestle bridge over the first arm. However the near arm could be forded by wheeled and ~~the 248th~~ bridge was abandoned. The ford was improved.

Co A, 248th, and the 557th went to work on the bridge over the first arm after the completion of the canal bridge.

Just as the heavy ponton bridge over the first arm was completed, and the first vehicles commenced crossing, artillery fire started from the en held hills.

Co B, 248th, assisted Co B Hvy Pont Bn in constructing the bridge over the second arm. The en took turns shelling each bridge all afternoon. The third bridge was completed by 2000 that night. Two pontons were knocked out in shallow water and these were allowed to remain there.