

305  
ENGR  
Sep

5-12 Sp

11 Engrs  
lost

MOSELLE CROSSING 305th Engr Bn

Interview with Major Charles G Croker.

Prior to the 5th of Sept reconnaissance in force was able to reach the riverline with little opposition. Plans were made for a daylight crossing on the 5th. The site was PONT A MOUSSON (778-325). However no air or artillery support was provided. Rubber boats were to be used to ferry a small portion of CT 317 across. Six boats were available. Later it was planned to construct a heavy ponton bridge.

However by 1000 5th Sept, the men had failed to cross the river. They were pinned down in the bend and had succeeded only in crossing the canal. The six rubber boats were destroyed by artillery fire. 20 men were casualties. On the night of the 5th a battalion was moved to PAGNY where an attempt would be made simultaneous with a second attempt at PONT A MOUSSON. Time 0400. At PAGNY twenty boats were to be used. It was impossible to get the boats into the water. However it might have been possible to ford at this point. At PONT A MOUSSON thirty assault boats were to ferry the 3rd Bn, 2 317th CT, across. One company and one platoon did get across but at least one company failed to return. The 30 boats were lost, riddled with artillery and small arms fire. All the boats were either shot up or lost in the water. 11 Engineers were lost. Either killed or wounded. Some boats made three trips bringing wounded before being destroyed. It was later ascertained that a dam below the crossing site had been opened which speeded up the current considerably. The boats were pulled downstream. After the failure of this attempt the 80th withdrew to the high ground to the West and commenced planning for an attempt to force a crossing against strong resistance.

This time the site chosen was DIEULOUARD. At that time Co C, 305th, was with the 319th in vicinity of TOUL. There a crossing was effected in the face of little opposition. The 318th was in reserve & of DIEULOUARD cleaning out the high ground vic MARBACHE. It was planned to cross the 317th CT which would push eastward and secure the high ground ST GENEVIEVE and the hill to the South (LA FALAISE). The 318th CT would then cross and swing northward to secure MOUSSON Hill. The 2nd Bn, 317th CT, was to cross North of the island (784-301). The 3rd Bn was to ford across the canal and two arms of the river in the vicinity of the island (785-283). The 1st Bn was to follow the 2nd. At midnight, the night before the crossing a recon patrol of six men from Co A aided by two Frenchmen located a ford over the far arm of the river. They also located the dam over the far branch and saw to it that it was ready to be blown. The ford was marked with tracing tape. Co B was to work with the 2nd Bn. 2 men out of six were killed.

The infantry were to cross at 0400. Actually there was a delay and the doughboys started at 0500. 12th Sept. Co B, 305th, first bridged the canal with a footbridge. A number of barges in the canal facilitated this job by providing a firm base. By 0900 the foot bridge over the river was completed. It was a four hour job. Handcarry from road to river was necessary. After the canal was bridged 17 plywood assault boats were put across the canal and used for crossing the river. 15 men of whom 12 are infantrymen and three engineers fit into these boats. The men paddle while one man in the stern guides with a paddle. 17 boats are sufficient to cross an infantry rifle company. After the assault boats crossed the company work was commenced on the foot bridge across the river. One platoon, Co C, aided Co B in the construction of the footbridge over the river.

Co A minus one platoon which acted as infantry with the second bn guided the men across the canal and both arms of the river to the South following the route and using the fords taped off by the patrol of the night before. The one platoon of engineers which served as infantrymen went armed with rope, pick, explosives, pins, in short all prepared for mines and booby traps. In point of fact no mines were found in vicinity of crossing sites.

MOSELLE CROSSING

305th Engr Bn

Interview with Major Charles G Croker (cont)

Characteristics of the MOSELLE: The terrain on both sides of river flat. River has low banks. Current fast flow. Estimated flow 5 miles per hour. Changeable rate of flow. For example in the first attempted crossing PONT A MCBUSON an opened dam drove many assault boats northward downstream. Bottom muddy but a firm bottom for a big river. Depth varies. Avar approx 5 to 6 feet. Width approx 150 feet. Canal width 40 feet. 200 feet bridging equipment required for canal and river to North site. At North site two footbridges built, one over canal, one over river. In crossings attempted at PONT A MCBUSON 38 out of 64 assault boats lost. Tanks require Class 40, other vehicles Class 9 Bridge. 305th Engr Bn responsible for getting foot elements across. 1117th Engr Group resp for getting across the vehicular traffic.

Coordinates of fording sites over both arms of river at island.  
1st arm: (784-286); 2nd arm: 791-295. Armor could ford for awhile at least over first arm, but all attempts to ford an armd dozer over second arm failed

970W

FOR/ Maj. Cole

INTERVIEWS BY T/SGT. C.J. ANGULO

MOSELLE CROSSING 1117 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.

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 floods 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 CUISTE 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 G1 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 CUISTE 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.

CANAL  
DYKE  
RIVER

1117  
ENGR  
SEP

See  
Angulo Mtl

5TH

12TH

C-9 = 450m bridge

MOSELLE CROSSING (2) 1117 Engr Group

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 0600 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 0900, 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.

13th  
12th  
16th



MOSELLE CROSSING(3)

1117 Engr Group

Interview with Major Brock, 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 was forded across 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 12th it was ready.

On the night of the 11th 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 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 site downstream from first Co B bridge. Was constructed and stood in 2 or 3 days.

Interview with Major R.R. McCorkle, Sgt 248th Engr Bn, and Capt E.H. Lockrell. The 167th and 248th combined had 50 machine guns set up along the hill (BOIS DE CUIE) 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 trestle 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.

12th

13th

12th

MOSELLE CROSSING (4) 1117 Engr Group

Although the three bridges were in by 2000, no armor crossed. The next morning the en counterattacked. Many infantrymen came back across the bridges. Co B, 248th, was guarding the third heavy ponton bridge. During the night some Germans had infiltrated and brought to bear small arms fire on Co B's position. But Co B was well dug in and there were no casualties.

Between 4 and 5 next morning Co A alerted in bivouac 4 miles West of DIEULOUARD. This Co was organized as infantrymen and set up as security on the island. At the island they were briefed on the situation. Outposts were set up along the river and on the island. One platoon of 167th aided in security of island and bridges.

On the afternoon of the 15th, Cos B and C, 248th, were alerted. It was reported that the en was attacking from the SE with 30 tanks. The Group Commander ordered all available to the third heavy ponton bridge. 12 squads were formed out of the two companies. At the island the Group Commander ordered the Exec 2 to move the men as infantry to LOISY. The Exec 3 went as liaison with the inf at LOISY. A runner was sent back to guide the engr to LOISY. The 318th was N of LOISY. The Germans had counterattacked. First the engineers staged on the E side of the road as reserve. Later when the East side was plugged they moved to the West side. They remained in support until the inf attacked at which time the engineers became security for LOISY. As the men moved up toward LOISY an arty barrage opened up on them. They pulled back S of LOISY. At 0400 the inf jumped off and it was then that the engr occupied position N side of LOISY. Later more inf arrived (1 Bn, 317th) to relieve the engineers. At 2 in the morning B and C relieved. Whole bn relieved next morning.

The original plan called for mgs and arty to support inf initial crossing where one stream. the 305th and 167th build an inf support bridge. At DIEULOUARD the 167th build an inf support br to get light traffic and supplies across.

In some spots the river shallow for hvy ponton bridge. Pneumatic floats were used to support pontons.

Two days before crossing the Group CO reconnoitred from BELLVILLE to DIEULOUARD up and down stream, thoroughly going over canal and river. No good bridge sites from BELLVILLE up. A hill SE would have to be cleared before build br S of island. Where canal and river together steep banks and no possible approaches where vehicles can get to river. The general plan called for crossing between BELLVILLE and DIEULOUARD.

15<sup>th</sup>

MOSELLE CROSSING (5) 1117 Engr Group

Interview with Major Leonard W. Peterson, Group Operations Officer.

The MOSELLE RIVER in this vicinity is exceptionally fast, which was not advantageous. The dyke between the canal and the river is a little over the height of a man. This fact aided considerably in the construction of the first bridge, the bridge over the canal, insofar as it precluded direct observation on the part of the enemy. The width of the river is one hundred and fifty on the average. The river banks are abrupt and required bulldozing down before bridging. During the first three days work was done under heavy mortar and arty fire. *Salvage swim?*

Regarding the choice of sites, it would seem that it would have been wiser to put the heavy ponton across the far arm so as to take advantage of the only road across the island. However in view of the fact that the en had zeroed in his arty on all the likely crossing points, it was decided to place the third ponton bridge downstream. A second possibility was to use the dam near the far end of the macadam road. This was discarded because it was believed that the en arty was ranged in along the macadam road.

At 2000 on the night of the 12th the third ponton was completed. While work was in process on this bridge, Col Lovett and Major Peterson decided to put in a second heavy ponton over the far arm downstream during darkness. Some work was commenced on this bridge near the site of the first heavy ponton over the far arm during daylight and on the night of the 13th was floated down to the selected site downstream. It was hoped that the en would be unaware of this bridge. However the next morning at daybreak 25 shells landed near this site. A few days later when it was believed that the en was well ranged in on the downstream sites, the first ponton and the fifth were dismantled to provide material for a ponton at the end of the macadam road. Incidentally in that vicinity the river is considerably more than average width.

One factor which had an effect on engr operations was the heavy rainfall previous to the 12th. The banks were soft and the fast current frequently washed bridging material downstream. This difficulty was eliminated to some extent by damming up one arm and canalizing the flow through the other arm while work progressed on the first arm. Thus use was made of the two existing dams.

There was little information on the far arm. On the 11th the two combat battalions had carried out reconnaissance. Also Col Lovett, Major Peterson, Major Adams, Capt Ernest, and Lt Ryan had crept to the bank under cover.

It was possible to ford tanks across the first arm. Then Major Peterson sent Capt Cote, CO B Co 167th, and Lt Hurlbut forward to check the farther arm for fords. A possibility was located (see overlay). After one and a half hours work it was decided to make an attempt. A medium tank with a dozer blade was brought forward and with Major Peterson on board it proceeded part way across before bogging down. It was then obvious that a heavy ponton would have to be put in as soon as possible in order to get the tanks across.

The en had mined and booby trapped portions of the far bank. These were blown in place by placing charges on top and exploding the charges.

Many times the engr were called upon to act as infantrymen. 20 mgs were taken from edge of BOIS DE CUIVE where these had supported the initial assault and placed on the far end of the island as defence against possible counterattack.

Theoretically a heavy ponton is not built while danger of arty fire. Actually these heavy pontons were put in while there still existed small arms fire. The engr had to contend with mines below and shells from above. When they heard the whistles of shells they would hit the ground. After the blast they would resume work. There were occasional casualties.

12th

11th

MOSELLE RIVER (6) 1117 Engr Group

A hit on the third bridge held up traffic ten minutes. This was the only delay due to bridge difficulties.

Interview with Capt Paul Cote, CO B Co 167th Bn. ? AN?

On the night of the 11th Capt Cote was in charge of six road guides directing Co B, an arty battery, and a mg battery to the river. At 2:30 Group received word that DIEULOUARD was occupied by Germans. For this reason there was some hesitation in sending equipment down. By 7:00 the trucks arrived and Co B commenced work on a pneumatic float bridge across the canal. After the completion of this bridge Co B started constructing a ford across the first arm of the river. One platoon of this co swept for mines along the far bank of the first arm.

This outfit was used as security. One platoon was disposed along the far branch near the dam extending to a patch of woods to the N of the dam. The other two platoons were security for the island itself.

In the construction of the pneumatic float job it was necessary to cut the bank down with a bulldozer and cut out the railroad tracks. Then it was necessary to cut a path through the 7 foot bank.

Regarding the river, the current was swift, 6 to 7 mph. Its width not sufficient for a floating Bailley. The RHINE is wide enough for a floating Bailley. The banks are pretty hard. It was necessary to cut away the banks in order to make shoulders for the bridges.

Concerning the possible use of the dam for crossing the vehicles, the lip was too slippery. The dam was wide enough, but there was no protection on the far side. A truck could very easily slip off.

The attempt of the armored dozer to ford the far arm met with failure because of the muddy river bottom.

Many outfits were working at the same time. There was good coordination. It was impossible to reconnoiter the far arm until the first bridges were completed. Also there was fighting on the farther side; it was impossible to get there to effect reconnaissance.

Regarding choice of sites, accessibility to DIEULOUARD, availability of approaches, and proximity to possible fording sites were governing factors.

11 Sep  
12 Sep  
HAW