

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 O to move the men as infantry to LOISY. The Exec O 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.

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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. *Peterson's opinion?*

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 Hurlbrutt 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.

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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 German. 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.