

UNIT
PERIOD
ACTION
SOURCE

8022

: 166th Engr Bn, 135 Engr Group.
: 5 Feb to 12 Feb 1945.
: Crossing of the Sauer River at
DILLINGEN, LUXEMBOURG.
: Capt Dale S. Wallace, 166th Bn S-2
2nd Lt Robert P. Nyhanna, 166th Bn,
Asst S-3.
T/Sgt Xenophon G. Nichols, S-2 Intelli-
gence Sgt.

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW : 166th Bn CP, MERSCH, LUXEMBOURG,
14 Feb 1945.
INTERVIEWER : Lt S. J. Tobin.
MAP : WALLENDORF #6103,
Scale 1/ 25,000.

During the afternoon of 4 Feb 45, the 166th Engr Bn received information that it would take part in the crossing of the Sauer River in conjunction with one of the regiments of the 80th Div. The S-2 section obtained air photos of the proposed crossing areas and all other necessary preparations were started.

On 5 Feb, the company CO's got together with the infantry Bns of the 318th, 80th Div to work out details for the crossing. Members of the infantry Bns and the Engr Co CO's starting out at 2000 made a reconnaissance to the river front to get personal information of the sites. Plans called for a foot bridge, an infantry support bridge, and a class 40 treadway bridge. The reconnaissance parties were unable to reach the river due to enemy action. Heavy small arms and MG fire prevented the parties from obtaining definite information at the crossing sites. It was estimated by the unit CO's that the approximate width of the river was 150 feet. Other patrols both infantry and Engr scouted for routes of approach to the proposed crossings. Information obtained indicated that DILLINGEN was too exposed to be a profitable site, besides the area was heavily mined with teller and regal mines. The current of the river was estimated as 10 miles per hour. Banks at the edge of the river were 6 feet high. In many places slopes to the river banks were

as steep as 30 %. The banks were solid rock along the ~~banks of the~~ bridge sites. They knew that the crossing sites would be strongly opposed and under fire. Some personnel mines at the edges of the river were known to exist. During the day 2 platoons were ^{sent} to build practice bridges in the vicinity of MOESTROFF. While the platoons were building the practice foot and infantry support bridges, other units began moving necessary equipment for the crossings. B company moved their assault boats to the area in vicinity of (972408) during the afternoon of the 5th.

During the day, 6 Feb A and C companies moved up materials for their bridges to the vicinity of (975398) in readiness for their crossings. After dark on the 6th the 166th Engr Bn moved up to PLETSCHETTE FARM where they set up their CP with the 318th Inf (948365). At 1800 information was received that the attack was to be postponed from 0200 to 0300 on the morning of 7 Feb. The information was relayed to the companies and general preparations were completed during the night. The infantry moved up to the woods in a position about 1000 yards from the river. The plan was for Engr guides to meet the infantry and bring them to the crossing site. The infantry would carry the assault boats down to the river. The assault crossing and the foot bridge was to be at a position where the woods extended almost to the river (977408). The infantry support bridge was to be placed at (977413) and a Class 40 treadway at (984403). The weather at the time was bad, the streams were very high; it was raining and very muddy. The Engr guides met the infantry and got them into position for the first assault wave.

At 0300 on the morning of 7 Feb B company 166th Engr landed F company 318th Inf in their first wave unopposed. At 0327 Fox company was reported on the enemy side of the river. The boats returned without loss. Meanwhile the other companies were being led up to the crossing

by the guides. The route from the assembly area along a path around the mountain and down to the river. As the second wave started to cross they were met by terrific MG and small arms fire with some artillery and mortar included. A MG was firing directly at the assault crossing from the draw across the river at (9841). This MG continued to harass the crossing for two days before being knocked out. Each time a group was sent to destroy it the crew would withdraw and hide until they could come back and fire on the crossing again. Enemy opposition made it impossible to cross in waves and single assault boats were sent across. Artillery smoked the crossing from daylight until 1400 when the smoke was lifted and all troops laid low while our artillery plastered the enemy. The 314th FA fired on pill boxes and targets of opportunity for about one hour. The fire was very effective, neutralizing most of the enemy opposition to the crossing. Smoke was again laid on the area. By 1400 on 7 Feb two companies, E and F and one platoon of G company were across. While bringing up the infantry to the crossing site after the first wave enemy artillery scattered the men necessitating that the Engr guides round up the men in order to get them down to the crossing. This was due to disorganization caused by the enemy artillery fire scattering the men and lack of company control ^{to bring them back together again} of the men. Engineer casualties up to 1400 were 2 killed and 8 wounded.

Meanwhile, other units of the Bn were standing by until the situation was right for them to begin their operations. Much of the ~~heavy~~ heavier bridging equipment and material had to be moved back out of ~~the~~ reach of ^{Enemy} ~~enemy~~ fire during the morning. Nebelwerfer fire was coming from the vicinity of CRUCHTEN and a pill box at (978421) had direct fire down the river.

At 1600 the assault crossings were resumed and B company continued

to shuttle the infantry across the river. The current of the river was estimated at from 12 to 15 miles per hour and after several unsuccessful attempts to put in a foot bridge the idea was given up by about 2000. By this time, 2000, the rest of G company had been shuttled across a boat load at a time. Approximately 40 boats had been lost due principally to being shot up by enemy fire. Other boats were brought up from way of BIGELBACH by truck and down the road to the woods, were carried to the river by hand. Two trucks were knocked out by enemy artillery at (971415). During the day any unsuccessful attempt was made to construct a raft bridge, but the floats were carried away by the current. After dark, A company got one cable across the river and C continued effort to put in a foot bridge. The foot bridge failed but a ferry was established at the cable. By shuttling at the assault crossing, the 1st Bn, 318th was successfully put across during the night. The 1st Bn was reported across at 0300 on 8 Feb.

On 8 Feb shuttling continued and by noon the 3rd Bn was on the enemy side of the river.

Additional artillery used was an 8 inch howitzer unit which destroyed several pill boxes. Company A 91st Chemical Bn used 4.2 inch mortars on 8 Feb to smoke the area. Enemy activity at this time was purely defensive with sporadic unobserved artillery fire. During the day, the Class 40 bridge was ready in BEAUFORT (960381) to be put across the river, one platoon of C company was there ready to move the bridge up. ~~Preparations for~~ ^{was made} Another attempt to put in the foot bridge; this was again a failure and was given up by ~~1000~~ 0300 on 9 Feb 45. B company was able to get one jeep across the ferry at 0200 but the current tore the ferry out by 0400.

Meanwhile supplies, wounded and PW's were being shuttled back and

forth in the assault boats. On the morning of 9 Feb smoke on the area was lifted enemy small arms fire being negligible. The ferry was again completed about 1700. Enemy opposition was limited to sporadic arty and nebelwerfer fire. The second ferry lasted until about 2000 before being destroyed by the current. They were able to get another jeep and more supplies across before it went out. During the ensuing period, the platoons were rotated to rest. One platoon was used to man the assault boats. The 150 Engr BN was brought down to build the Class 40 bridge on Feb 9.

The BN continued to rest and maintain the assault boat crossing and on 12 Feb ,at 1600they began work to restore the bridge at Dillingen 984404.

This bridging operation was the most difficult ever attempted by the unit according to the B' officers. They used 420 assault boats and they lost approximately 300 due to enemy action and the terrific current. It was not unusual for a boat to be carried 75 to 100 yards down stream during a crossing. Several men were drowned, including infantrymen. Total Engr casualties were 2 killed, 6 missing, and 33 wounded.