

Summary Of Interviews
Moselle Operation
80th Inf Division

Interviews by Lt. T.E. Burts , Jr.

317th Infantry (Regt.)

Lt. Col. L.E. Fisher , Regimental Executive Officer
Major J.D. Hayes (Evacuated)-Former S-2 of Regt
Captain S.A. Ford (Evacuated)- Former S-3 of Regt

Preliminary Reconnaissance Phase: First Attack 4th September,

At 0900, 4th of September , Col..A.D. Cameron , Commanding the 317th Infantry , told Major J.D. Hayes , S-2, that he thought advisable an initial reconnaissance of the area to their immediate front, and along the Moselle River, with a view to possible crossing sites in the event that the regiment received orders to bridge the river.

The battalions of the regiment were at this time holding defensive positions , consolidating after a rapid move from Commercy to the east. According to instructions , Major Hayes picked from them two patrols, consisting of one platoon each, for a reconnaissance of the river. They were to use the Flirey - Pont a Mousson road as a boundary, and on the north the patrols were to use the area Pagny-sur-Moselle to Pont a Mousson exclusive in their search for crossing sites. In the south, they were to use the area Pont a Mousson to Dieulouard inclusive .

The reports of the patrols revealed possible crossing points at Pagny, at points south of Vandieres , and at Dieulouard. However , it was also ascertained that that all points were in clear observation zones that the enemy could observe troop movements as far back as Flirey; and that Pont a Mousson was being interdicted. A fording place was also found in the vicinity of Pagny sur Moselle.

Planning Phase: Preliminary Action Phase:

The battalions had moved as far forward as possible, without coming under enemy observation.

When Colonel Cameron returned from a conference at the Division CP, in the afternoon of the 4th of September, a meeting of his staff was called . Representatives of the air support and of the artillery were present , and Colonel Cameron revealed the fact that plans were to be made for a crossing of the river immediately. It was understood that both air and artillery support were to be used. Plans were made to the effect:

2d Bn to jump off across canal and river from the vicinity of the Bois de Villers , fording at Pagny, move due east , up hill 385, turn south along the ridge line and take hill 365.

1st Bn was to jump off at the same time , move east through Jezainville into Blenod - les- Pont a Mousson, cross the canal, take assault boats across the river , pass south of Atton into the Foret de Facq and take Mousson from the Foret.

The attack was originally scheduled to jump off at 1000, 5 Sept. However, the plans were changed and the attack was set up to 0930. A verbal order from the regimental commander , was issued to CT 317 at 2300, on the 4th of September.

The verbal order (Copy Attached) gave in essence the same plan. The 3rd Bn was to follow the 1st Bn over their crossing site. The 610 TD Bn was to support the attack by direct fire on CT objective. The 313th FA Bn was to be in direct support of the 1st Bn, and the 512th FA Bn was to be in direct support of the 2d Bn. Field Artillery concentrations were to be fired on CT objective as soon as observation was possible on the 5th of September. Air Bombardment and strafing of hill 365 and Mousson Hill to the N and S was to take place at 0800-0830-0900 0930-1000. 787-362

Orders were a little late in reaching the 2d Bn because they were out of communication due to enemy action. The attack jump d off as scheduled at 0930 instead of at 1000 as originally planned. The time was changed the night before the attack. However, the air bombardment and support did not come because of weather at the air field. Artillery support did not follow the original plan.

Both lead battalions moved on their objectives by the prescribed routes of approach. The 1st Bn crossed the canal successfully and approached the river with engineer assault boats. At this point enemy machinegun fire cut into the unit, followed by a terrific artillery and mortar barrage. As a result, the battalion suffered heavy casualties, lost five boats and was forced to withdraw to the canal line and dig in here by 1500. The 2d Bn was caught by enemy mortar and machinegun fire while approaching Pagny. The battalion was deployed and attempted to advance to their crossing site. However, they were unable to reach the canal or river because of heavy enemy fire. Now, the 3rd Bn attempted to force a crossing in the vicinity of Pont a Mousson later in the day. They were stopped also by a terrific concentration of enemy fire. During the night of the 5th of September two more efforts were made. The 2d Bn came down from 787-408 their positions near Pagny and attempted a crossing just south of Vandieres where they intended to ford the river. They were once more stopped here by the same type of resistance. To the south, at Blenod, the 1st Bn pushed out from Blenod with assault boats, crossed the canal, and were again cut to pieces with their boats between canal and river. By 0200, on the 6thn, the 3rd Bn had successfully crossed the river near Blenod with a strength of about two companies, but by daylight the unit had suffered such a severe counter-attack that they were forced to withdraw to the west side of the river again.

Now extensive reconnaissance, reorganization, and planning were started for a second attack date which was to be announced later.