

Paris

UNIT: 317th Infantry, 80th Infantry Division.

PERIOD: 8 November - 29 December 1944.

ACTION: Lorraine Campaign (Seille and Nied Crossings and reduction of Maginot Fortresses and St. Avoird).

SOURCE: Major A. C. Johnson, S-4, 317th Infantry.

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: HOHENSCHEIMANGAU, GERMANY, 317th Infantry CP, 21 June 1945.

INTERVIEWER: Captain James J. Cowen.

MAPS: 1/50,000 --	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>SHEET NO.</u>	<u>GSGS NO.</u>
	Nomeny	34-14	4471
	Metz	34-13	4471
	St. Avoird	35-13	4471
	Saarguemines	3613	4471

NOTE: Regiment S-4 journal was used as reference during interview.

On the morning of the Lorraine Campaign jump-off, 8 November 1944, the CP of the 317th Infantry was located at the Chateau Dombasle (8434). The 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, on the regimental right flank, crossed the Seille River generally in the area of Port-sur-Seille (8536), while the 3d Battalion, on the left, crossed the Seille just north of Morville-sur-Seille (8436). The 2d Battalion, in reserve, was following the 3d Battalion.

The two leading battalions did not find enemy infantry resistance strong, but they did run into heavy mortar and artillery fire causing heavy casualties. The 317th's supporting artillery was heavy, however, but the regiment did not know just how effective it had been. To aid the river crossing, the regiment put all available guns, including AA quad-50 calibers, on the high ground west of the river.

At the time, torrential rains had both the Seille and the Moselle Rivers flooded, preventing the completion of a vehicular bridge of any kind until the next day, 9 November 1944. This factor caused much concern with the three battalions of the 317th, the CO's clamoring for vehicles and equipment as soon as they got across, but not re-

ceiving them until the next day. This flood condition also made it necessary to put a treadway across a small stream located at (854360) that normally a man could step over.

Before the day's operations were over, two bulldozers were lost to mines at the road junction (852351) just east of Port-sur-Seille.

On 9 November, the regimental CP moved to Raucourt (8938). During that day flank- ing fire from the north was received all along the 317th's front. This condition was caused by the fact the 5th Division, on the immediate left (north) flank, did not jump across the Seille until one day later than the 80th. Consequently they had not come up abreast of the 80th and guns in the 5th Division zone were firing south on the 317th.

After the 1st and 3d Battalions by-passed St. Jure (8940), the 2d Battalion entered and cleared the town during the afternoon of 9 November. It was about this time that the 6th Armored, with the mission of exploiting any breakthrough situation that might present itself, shoved leading elements up to the St. Jure area, passing over the bridges and through the bridgehead established by the 80th.

The 1st Battalion, at first abreast of the 3d and on the regimental right flank, got ahead of the 3d Battalion considerably. After taking Ressaincourt (9138), the 1st Battalion followed a route over the road just north of the Bois de Ressaincourt (915385) running into Secourt (9440). The 1st Battalion reached Secourt just at dawn.

Because the vehicles had not caught up with them yet, the battalions were forced to hand-carry all weapons. The 3d Battalion, cut up in the initial crossing of the Seille and in subsequent fighting, occupied Hill 256 (897385) and a point at (907390), where they dug in for the night. It was at this time that the 1st Battalion continued on and got some 3,000 yards out in front of the 3d.

A peculiar incident, deciding the fate of a lot of men in the 1st Battalion in general and Company A in particular, occurred the next day, 10 November. The situation at dawn had the 1st Battalion still on the right and the 3d Battalion on the left, but lagging considerably. At this time, the 2d Battalion still in the St. Jure region, was

notified to move up, pass through the 3d Battalion, and get abreast of the 1st Battalion.

The 2d Battalion moved up in good time, but when they arrived they found that instead of being on the left of the 1st Battalion they now were on the right, having switched regimental zones. Rather than change back over, it was agreed that they would stay put. They thought nothing of the matter then, and at the time of the interview seven months later, still didn't put much significance in the inadvertent switch-over, despite the fact it was pointed out that the exchange of positions was the difference between Company A and not one of the 2d Battalion companies making the critical Han-sur-Nied (0544) crossing the next day. (See Company A, 317th Infantry, interview, also included in this series.)

Major Johnson stated that one of the contributions leading to the error of maneuver was the fact that radios had to be hand carried. As a result of their jostling, they became inoperative, communications became poor or completely lost, and the switch occurred.

The regimental CP moved forward to Secourt late in the afternoon of 10 November. The 1st Battalion then moved on with TF Godfrey, 6th Armored Division, and aided in the capture of the town of Luppy (9843).

The road through Bois de Ressaincourt had a formidable road block that was cleared by 80th Division engineers. During the clearing operation, the woods were shelled by enemy artillery.

On 11 November, the 1st Battalion, with Company A involved in the principal attack, worked in conjunction with elements of the 6th Armored Division in capturing the bridge across the French Nied River at Han and then enlarging the first Third Army bridgehead across that principal river during the remainder of the night. (See Han-sur-Nied cover story and appended interviews for complete details.)

The regimental CP moved up to Bechy at 1500 11 November and a forward regimental

CP went into Han at 2300 the same day. A few rounds of artillery were received in Han that night, causing damage to several vehicles.

During the night of 11-12 November, the 2d Battalion started crossing at 1230 hours. At 0200, the 3d Battalion started across and later expanded the bridgehead to include the high ground east of Han. During daylight hours the regimental CP moved across to Han. The battalions made their positions more secure during the day, but did not attempt to push out any further.

For the next seven days the 317th continued to hold ground already taken by other elements of the 80th and the 6th Armored Division. On 13 November, the 2d Battalion occupied positions stretching out to points just east of Many (1145), the 3d Battalion was located just west of Arriance (1047) and the 1st Battalion was in reserve in Herny (0845). The regimental CP also was in Herny, where a German half-track succeeded in getting through the lines. A reinforcement on guard thwarted the occupants when he shot the officer, and the other gave up.

On the 14th, there was no change except that the 3d Battalion moved out to actually occupy Arriance. Artillery and nebelwerfer fire was received in Herny, CP location of the 1st Battalion and the Regiment.

No change occurred during the five-day period 15-19 November except that the 1st and 2d Battalions exchanged positions, the 1st moving up to Many and the 2d coming back to Herny and going into reserve.

On 20 November, the 317th pushed out unopposed for the first time since the start of the Lorraine Campaign, making advances to the Allemande River some 4,500 yards to the northeast from Many and Arriance. The orders were to move out reconnaissance in force, but the advance was so easily accomplished that the entire regiment made the jump. The 1st Battalion passed from Many, through Mainviller (1347) to the vicinity of Grehange (1550), while the 3d Battalion pushed through the Remilly woods (1050), which were found totally unoccupied, to the vicinity of Elvange (1352). The 2d Battalion, still in

reserve, moved to Many. General Horace McBride, Division CG, personally came to the regiment to issue the orders for these moves, following several changes in orders just previous to his arrival.

On 21 November, the 317th sent patrols across the Allemande River in the Elvange and Grehange areas and they succeeded in penetrating a distance of four miles north of that stream without running into opposition.

For the next two days, 22 and 23 November, the 317th went into division reserve, withdrawing slightly at the time. The 1st Battalion moved back to Mainviller, the 2d Battalion to Many and the 3d Battalion to Herny. The 317th was directed to put a platoon in the Cote de Gaudrin (117523) area to protect the division's north flank, placing road blocks at Guinglange (1253) and Hemilly (1052).

On 24 November, the 317th moved up into position prepared to breach the Maginot forts in the vicinity of St Avoild (2557). On this day the 1st Battalion went into position at Crehange, the 2d Battalion went in just east of Faulquemont (1752), and the 3d Battalion, in reserve, put their CP in Mainviller. The regimental CP was set up in Faulquemont.

The 2d Battalion attacked at 0800 25 November following an artillery preparation, striking northeast through the Bois de Pontpierre (195525) and reducing three forts southeast of Laudrefang (2054) in the Laudrefang Woods (205535). Meeting far less opposition than they anticipated, the 2d Battalion encountered only light infantry resistance, but heavy artillery and mortar fire during the day's operations.

In the meantime, the 1st Battalion, on the 317th's left flank, met even less resistance, driving northeast to the vicinity of the town of Laudrefang. The regimental CP went into the town of Tritteling (1954). The 3d Battalion, in reserve, dug in between Laudrefang and Tritteling. Vehicles were held up by a tank ditch just west of Laudrefang at (196543). Because the roads were pock-marked with crater holes, blown bridges and culverts, plus the tank traps in the area, supplies were slow moving up to

the front-line troops. The 2d Battalion was supplied by moving vehicles across country.

The attack to the east was continued at 0800 26 November. The 2d Battalion met little resistance as it occupied the ground east of Folschviller (2353), while the 1st Battalion attacked to take the high ground east of Valmont (2454). The 3d Battalion, in reserve, closed west of Valmont, and the regimental CP went in at Teting (2251), where they found a series of elaborate houses, apparently French officers billets for those formerly occupied with defending the Maginot fortresses. This day the 317th found the same type of defense put up by the Germans, plenty of mortar and artillery fire along with minefields and blown roads and bridges, but infantry opposition was extremely light.

On the 27th of November, the 317th exploited the German withdrawal to the fullest. The regiment pursued the enemy in columns of battalions in the following order: 3d, 1st and 2d, to regain contact. The 3d Battalion, which had been in reserve, passed through the 1st and became the leading element on this day. The axis of advance was via the road through Folschviller and Valmont, turning east at Ebersviller (2856) and continuing through Machern (3056), Guenviller (3257) to Seingbouse (3457). There contact was regained.

The 1st Battalion peeled off from the axis of advance, turning somewhat southeast and digging in west of Lachambre (2854). The leading 3d Battalion halted for the night at Seingbouse, while the 2d Battalion and the regimental headquarters went into Ebersviller for the night.

At 0700 28 November, the 1st Battalion moved out in a northeasterly direction in an effort to come abreast of the leading 3d Battalion. The plan was for the 1st to be on the immediate right of the 3d. However, by the time the 1st Battalion reached a point due south of Seingbouse, the 3d Battalion already had moved out and was still considerably in front of the 1st. The 1st Battalion cut across country and passed through the La Grande Frene woods (3054). By 1600, the 1st Battalion had A and C Companies at

points southeast of Farebersviller (3758) along a line running from (382577 to 387570). Shortly thereafter the Germans, laying back with four tanks and about seventy-five infantry assembled in the area (377582), cut south in between A and C Companies and the rest of the battalion, then located in the vicinity of (373567), just west of the Metz-Saarguemines railroad line. This enemy counter-attack also succeeded in cutting off A and C Companies from the 3d Battalion, which had entered Farebersviller in the meantime. The CP of the 1st Battalion was set up in an open field near (3757). During the night members of A and C Companies, completely disorganized, infiltrated through the German lines to the battalion area. The enemy force also captured thirty wounded men of the 1st Battalion in a farm house (Farm Brousktr at (376572)). B Company patrols went out in the night in an effort to relieve the two cut-off companies and succeeded in freeing the thirty walking wounded, being led away when recaptured.

In the meantime, the 3d Battalion had moved out from Seinghouse at 0830 that morning, 28 November. A speedy move was made to Farebersviller, but when leading elements struck that town, the complexion of the situation changed radically. It was no longer a pursuit, but rather a defense of the town following entrance into the community. The actual entrance into the town also was difficult, having to occupy it by means of house-to-house fighting as the enemy withdrew slowly and stubbornly. By dusk, the 3d Battalion had cleared only the west side of the town, with the enemy still physically occupying the east end of Farebersviller.

At 2000, the enemy counterattacked with armor and infantry (estimated three tanks and 200-300 infantry). (Several officers consulted stated very definitely that the force seemed to be fanatics inspired by strong drink). The enemy force carried all the way through the town to the western edge. The 3d Battalion lost several supply trucks and a couple of $\frac{1}{2}$ -tons, but managed to keep their own force intact and to hold onto the western side of Farebersviller, beating back the attackers in a confused situation. In the disorganized fighting, heavy losses were sustained, but the CP of the 3d Battalion

managed to stick in the town.

The 2d Battalion, which also had advanced rapidly to occupy positions in the vicinity of Hill 316 (364587) north of Farebersviller, was not molested by any enemy activity until dawn of the next day, 29 November. The Germans threw a force of five tanks supported by infantry at them at that time, but they succeeded in beating the enemy off. Another attack from a force of similar size also developed shortly afterwards, but the 2d Battalion also was able to take care of that threat. After that, the Germans laid off, throwing in an occasional round of artillery.

The 3d Battalion continued to mop-up Farebersviller, completing the job the 29th of November. Artillery also fell in the town that day. The 1st Battalion sector was all quiet after the hectic experience of the day before.

At the end of the period, 29 November, the 317th was relieved in place by the 318th the former moving the regimental CP to Machern.

For the period 8 November to 29 November 1944, the 317th suffered 1524 casualties, of which 338 were IIA (Injured In Action). This latter class included trench foot cases, into which category fully 80 per cent of the 338 were estimated to fall.

The 317th's casualty breakdown follows:

	<u>EM</u>	<u>0</u>
KIA	119	6
MIA	259	7
DOW	38	3
WIA	686	68
IIA	<u>325</u>	<u>13</u>
	1427	97