

Following story result of another interview with Major Hayes, and his staff.)

"It was about 1600, on the 5th of September. The Third Battalion had been unable to force a crossing at Pont-A- Mousson . Patrols had been sent out previously to find a ford . However, the battalion had been stopped by enemy fire from the other side of the river, and was now pinned down there by machinegun fire.

" The 1st Bn jumped off at 2200, attempting a crossing before Blenod. The outfit had assault boats , but as the Infantrymen crossed the canal and the space between canal and river with the boats they were met by a withering fire from the enemy side of the river . The boats were literally shot out from under the men . They were met by heavy mortar , artillery, and machine-gun fire. The unit was cut to pieces, and was forced to pull back by 0100 6 Sept to a factory at Blenod. The whole battalion, shocked and demoralized by the heavy barrage, crowded into a factory building in this town. At 0300, A staff officer was sent down from the regimental CP to survey the situation. He reported to the regimental commander that further action with this battalion, in the immediate future, would be out of the question. (Officers and men were badly shaken.) The CO of the unit was soon relieved.

2. " Meanwhile, the 3rd battalion, by 0200, on the 6th, had crossed in boats with part of its units. The units were 'I' Company, one platoon and the weapons of 'K'-- two platoons of 'I' Company . This had also been done under intense artillery , mortar, and small arms fire. All these units had gotten across by daylight. However, upon landing on the other side of the river in the dark , they had been greeted by Germans lying on their bellies on the bank. These Germans tossed grenades in to the boats as they landed"

(Here an interview with Capt. Ford , S-3 of the regiment at the time of the action, reveals that the units to cross were different from those stated by Major Hayes. Captain Ford states that there were no elements of 'K'. He says: " It was 2 platoons of 'L' Company, a weapons section and 1 platoon from 'I' Company, a heavy MG section, a few men from 'M', and a few men from 3rd Bn HQ Company. 'I' Company crossed at the dam (canal) and the rest crossed at the bridge. The current was swift. It was hard to handle the boats in the water of the river. There were engineers with the boats.")

At daylight on the 6th, the men on the east bank of the river suffered a severe counter-attack. The men were caught southwest of Atton, where machine-guns located along the river bank were able to give infilade fire. This attack was also preceded by a heavy mortar barrage, with very accurate fire. Most of the men , according to eyewitness accounts, were killed or wounded. Twenty men were captured by the enemy.

(Major Hayes) "At this time , Major General McBride had come up to Montauville , the 3rd Bn CP, to have a conference so that he could shove all the troops across. While this conference was in progress, the bridgehead was wiped out .

" The 1st and 3rd Bns were then told to hold in their present position. Remnants of the 3rd Bn were now back across the river on our side. There was no word from the 2d Bn at this time, save for the report that one platoon of Company G had gotten across. This report proved to be false.

At 1000, 6 Sept, Lt. Col. Cameron and I visited the 2d Bn, dug in at Vandieres.

(317 th Inf. Cont. -Assault Boat Crossing- Maj. Hayes)

" While we were at Vandieres , where the 2d Bn was dug in, Lt.Col. Cameron , 1000 6 Sept. , issued the verbal order to the battalion to cross at the battalion commander's discretion."

When Lt. Cameron and Major Hayes had returned to the CP it was decided to bring the 2d Bn back to exploit Major Roberts (3rd Bn) crossing.

(Here statements and supporting facts will be brought in from interviews held with Captain Ford and Lt.Col. Fisher, S-3 and Executive office of the regiment at the time of the action.)

(Captain Ford)"At 1000 on the 6th, Lt.Col. Fisher , Colonel Cameron, the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Summers and the division artillery commander were making plans to cross the river on the 6th , at 1600. This was to be made at Pont-A-Mousson. This time was immediately changed to 1600 the 7th. Then the time was set up to 0400 for the 8th; and immediately changed to 0400 for the 9th."

Sketch #2
(Major Hayes)" At 1200, 6 Sept., the Executive of the regiment, told us we had orders not to move ; to hold all positions . The troops held all their positions until the 7th; then were pulled back to positions of readiness for the coming crossing. Company B was at Blenod ; C and A were dug in as shown on the sketch; the 1st Bn CP was located at (74.0-33.0 1:100000) . Company K , of the 3rd Bn was left in Pont-A-Mousson ; and the rest of the battalion was pulled back to the east of the Bois le Pretre with the battalion CP located in Montauville. The regt CP was at (71.7-32.6) Companies I and L were deployed as shown. The 2d Bn was now in an assembly area in the Foret de Puvenelle. It had been decided to send patrols from each battalion across the river, but these were canceled. On the 7th , I was sent to Company F at Villers. I told Lt.(1st.) Jess S. Barton to put the rest of his company in position on the edge of the woods to protect the left flank."

(Captain Ford)"At this same time the 512th FA Bn was counter- battered and forced to move from (70.9-33.5 1:100000)"

(Major Hayes)" At 1300 , on the 7th, 32 rounds of 150mm artillery landed in the Bois de Villers , coming from the vicinity of Mardigny . This was brought on , as an example of the enemy observation, by the display of a whip radio antenna , on a jeep riding through the town of Villers. Only one man was wounded by this barrage. At 1400, I returned to the regimental CP, and another conference was scheduled. Major General McBride, Brigadier General Summers , and Brigadier General Searby (Division artillery commander, later killed) were there. Colonel Cameron called me and said : ' I want reconnaissance at the point (78.2 - 30.2 1:100000) !

" The platoon leader of the I and R platoon , two scouts and observers and myself, with a patrol, went to the point indicated. The platoon leader reconnoitered (78.3-30.7) to the south. I reconnoitered the area (73.3-29.7) to the north. The I and R got across the canal by 1700 and I got across the canal later. Returning from this patrol, we met the Regimental Executive in the Bois de Cuite with the company commanders of the 3rd Bn and of the 1st Bn, together with Colonel Cameron at a point (77.8-29.8) . Reconnaissance had determined that the bridges across at Dieulouard and at Bezaumont were blown, and that Pont-a-Mousson and

Dieulouard were heavily interdicted.

" Colonel Cameron was told to make preparations for crossing; the date would be announced later. These preparations were taken under way at once. The division engineers started making their reconnaissance on the 8th; and this continued till the date of the crossing .

" A new position for the regimental CP was chosen at (74.8-28.9) and the PW enclosure was moved. We emplaced about 32 machineguns , with two Tank Destroyers, along the forward slope of the hill , Bois de Cuite. These guns were emplaced aimed and set for overhead fire by the Infantry, and were to be fired by the engineers during the crossing."

(Captain Ford) " We took the representatives of the different units and showed them where to assemble. The man responsible for emplacing the machine-guns was 1st. Lt. Clinton W. Markinweg . He had a 1st Sergeant and men from the 1st and 3rd Battalions. On the 9th 1st Lt. Smith was there to assist him."

(Major Hayes) "On the 8th, arrangements were made for a patrol, led by Lt. McLarry, to cross near Dieulouard to establish listening posts and further reconnoiter the area. They went across the canal near (78.8-29.2). At this point the patrol located 1 machine-gun, 1 enemy mortar squad, and a machine pistol . With this information, they left 4 men as a listening post. A party was sent out on the 9th to knock this stuff out. On the 7th and 8th we located outposts (as shown on the sketch). Our OP's had at this time picked up movement between St. Genevieve, Loisy and Bezaumont. "

(Now a plan was adopted to confuse the enemy. The area in which the units were to assemble and to jump off for the attack; were closed to all traffic of army or any other nature. No vehicles were allowed to be seen entering or leaving the area. All patrol activity was stopped in this area and a complete scene of inactivity greeted the enemy observer. Troops were even kept clear of the vital points.

The artillery now began a systematic shelling of the road from Loisy south on the enemy side. Concentrations were fired at the same points each day with the same intensity as before. When the concentrations landed here at "H-hour" they were the usual thing.)

During this period of waiting , there was enemy movement between Bezaumont noted at night. There was also a nightly concentration of enemy MG fire on the Bois de Cuite, while enemy artillery continued to fall on Pont-a-Mousson , Dieulouard and Jezainville.

4. (Major Hayes) " On the 11th of September, we received the order to attack on the 12th. At the CP a conference was held , at 1700, with Colonel Cameron, Lt. Col. Fisher, Captain Ford, Major McCullen, Myself and a Captain from the engineer company which was to build a bridge. Due to a shortage of equipment, the 3rd Bn was to cross by a ford; the 2d Bn by footbridge; the 1st Bn to follow the 2d Bn over the same route. However, Company B was to be left (as shown) to protect the engineers; and were to cross after the 1st Bn . The attack was scheduled for 0400, 12 September. An artillery concentration , scheduled for 0330-0400 was to be placed on the same road from Loisy."

(Captain Ford) " This artillery concentration was scheduled for 0415-0445."

(Major Hayes) "The battalions moved out at dusk to the regt. assembly area."