

*Pavia*

UNIT: Company A, 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, 80th Infantry Division.

PERIOD: 11-12 November 1944.

ACTION: Capture of bridge over NIED River at HAN.

SOURCE: T/Sgt Wilbur L. Anderson, then S/Sgt and squad leader, 1st Platoon.  
S/Sgt Winifred L. Martin, then machine gun section sergeant, Weapons Platoon.  
S/Sgt Russell L. Waldrum, then pfc and rifleman in 2d Platoon.  
Cpl Everett M. Bailey, then pfc and acting Squad leader, 2d Platoon.  
Pfc Lewis M. Snellgroves, assistant machine gunner in Martin's Weapons Platoon.  
Pfc Lewis C. Hyers, rifleman in 1st Platoon.  
Pfc Thomas W. Cunningham, member of communication section, company headquarters.

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: FUSSEN, GERMANY, Company A CP, 20 June 1945.

INTERVIEWERS: Captain J. J. Cowen and 1st Lt S. J. Tobin.

MAPS: 1/50,000 --	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>SHEET NO.</u>	<u>GSGS NO.</u>
	NOMENY	34-14	4471
	METZ	34-13	4471

NOTE: No records were used during the interview.

TF Godfrey, CCA, 6th Armored Division, had the mission of capturing the bridge over the NIED River at HAN and also the town of HAN-sur-NIED (0544) just east of the bridge, (see TF Godfrey interview also included in this series), but Company A, 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, was thrown into the thick of the operation because the 80th Infantry Division and the 6th Armored Division were advancing in the same zone and it so happened that the 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, fell into the same axis of advance as TF Godfrey the morning of 11 November 1944.

As a matter of fact, Company A became so involved in the action, which turned out to be the most important river crossing in the entire Third Army Lorraine Campaign (see composite story on HAN-sur-NIED) that it sent the first dismounted infantry troops across the span. It was a small group that went across first about 1400 11 November. The group included fourteen members of Company A, including the company commander, Captain Craig, (now a Lt Col recovering from wounds back in the States), and four infantrymen from the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, 6th Armored Division.

18

The fact that the interviewers, seven months after the action, were able to get five of the fourteen Company A members together was an almost unbelievable stroke of good fortune in the effort to piece the entire story together correctly. As it turned out, the interview with Company A shed a tremendous amount of accurate light on the entire dramatically "hot" bridge-crossing at HAN.

Most of the following narration was offered by Sgt Anderson, squad leader, 1st Platoon, Company A, who more or less was allowed to act as spokesman for the group. This position was willingly granted him by the other members who obviously hold Anderson in great respect for judgement and ability as a soldier. It also was gratifying to learn not only how much Anderson was in command of the situation, both before, during and after the capture of the bridge and town, but the others as well. Considering how they were pushed hurriedly into the action in a confused two-divisional zone without any definite central command in control of the operation, the six men showed a great deal more than average intelligence in their knowledge of the events and the tremendous problems that faced them.

Company A sided TF Godfrey in outposting the town of LUPPY (9843) after its capture late in the afternoon 10 November. The next morning 11 November, Company A moved out of LUPPY dismounted in road march formation -- column on either side of the road. At the time Company A very definitely was mixed into the TF Godfrey column which was completely motorized. Company A's instructions, the men very definitely remember, were to follow the fifth half-track of the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion. (This presumably means they were marching immediately behind the first 9th Armored Infantry Battalion platoon in the column.) In front, pointing the column were light tanks which were about 500 yards in front of Company A. The 1st Platoon, Company A was leading the company.

At the time, Anderson estimated there were no more than 28 to 30 effective combat-

ants left in Company A following the fight near SECOURT the day before. However, it is believed by other members of Company A that there were about double that number. Captain Craig also bore this out in an earlier interview with Lt S. J. Tobin. He estimated he had about 60 effectives.

As the column came into the vicinity of Bechy (0144) a hasty minefield across the road and projecting into the fields was encountered. This was about 1030. Hyers remembers that Lt Col Sterling Burnett, CO, 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, placed him as guide to warn all dismounted troops of the danger of the mines. The 1st Platoon entered the town without having to break their road march formation, encountering no resistance from enemy infantry. As they entered the town, however, the tanks supported their advance with 30 and 50 caliber fire. The 1st Platoon then passed through the town and went into an assembly area in an orchard located at (011439). Shortly thereafter about 12 rounds of artillery came into the vicinity of the orchard, but caused no casualties. Hyers, having finished his mission of acting as guide at the minefield, was coming up to rejoin his platoon, when artillery, apparently the same that hit near the orchard, came in on the town. Hyers also observed no damage or injury as a result. While in the orchard the 1st Platoon members ate K-rations.

The 1st Platoon then moved on down the road as the column reformed. But as they were about to pass through a wooded area, some of the tanks echeloned to the sides of the roads and sprayed the woods with their 30 calibers. Waldrum recalled that his 2d Platoon, marching down the left side of the road, became the targets by mistake for some of this friendly tank fire and orders had to be rushed back for the tanks to cease firing.

When they arrived at the woods (036444) overlooking the bridge at HAN and the town, they assembled. The armored task force already had arrived and also was assembling in the woods for the attack to follow. Anderson and the other were not in a position to see what the situation was on the river line, but they heard that six

German tanks had just crossed the bridge and they also could hear our friendly medium tanks firing, presumably on the enemy vehicles retreating.

At about 1330 (Waldrum was the only one of the group who seemed sure of the time) elements of the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion (part of TF Godfrey) were ordered to dismount and took up a diamond formation on either side of the road leading down to the bridge.

(At the time, Anderson recalled, he and his men were bitching about the wonderful equipment the armored infantry had in comparison to theirs -- shoulder harnesses, clean clothes kept that way in their half-tracks, polished mortar tubes, etc.)

At the same time, Company A was ordered to go into a skirmish line and follow the men of the 9th Armored. The first platoon of Company A was on the right side of the road leading to the bridge, the 2d Platoon on the left, the third platoon in reserve and the weapons platoon behind the first platoon on the right.

Up to then, no enemy fire had been received on the units in the assembly area and in taking up their assault formations.

Anderson remembers vividly that on the right side of the road where the 1st Platoon went into the skirmish line, a wire fence paralleled the road leading to the bridge and a series of about five other wire fences ran perpendicular to the parallel fence, necessitating crawling under all and causing considerable delay in their advance.

The infantry of both the 9th Armored and Company A had just started down the sloping hill towards the flooded NIED when a most mysterious type of fire opened up spraying the entire terrain. It was mysterious to Anderson for it was the first time he had ever experienced 20mm ack-ack. At the time, the 9th Armored was still in front of Company A. The ack-ack fire had a tendency to freeze the armored doughboys in place and Company A men hollered ahead over the din of the fire for them to go ahead or get behind so they could advance. This prompted the 9th Armored members to move but still too slowly to suit Company A. The armored men finally reached the defilade

gully running along the road that runs into ST EPVRE (0542), but there they stopped again. Then S/Sgt John R. Royce, platoon sergeant of the 1st Platoon, Company A, (Anderson's platoon sergeant) yelled at the platoon leader of the armored infantry to ask if he was going across the bridge. The armored lieutenant replied that he had orders to take his men only to the road, but had no instructions to go across the bridge.

This, to Anderson's way of thinking now, is the most serious mistake made in the entire operation. Had the lieutenant had definite instructions to go across (he may have had and misunderstood or simply chose not to carry out orders) and the movement down the 600 yard slope been swifter with little delay in the actual crossing, Anderson is convinced there would not have been a fraction of the casualties that actually occurred.

As it was the men on the forward slope were being riddled unmercifully from the ack-ack fire. It seemed to Anderson that some of them were hit so hard that their helmets were jolted as high as 50 feet into the air. There was a great deal of screaming and considerable panic resulted among some of the troops. There was absolutely no cover on the forward slope except for one tree, a concrete block and the fence posts.

The enemy fire was so effective that Anderson lost his entire squad of about seven men. He was the only man left in it. Because Company A did not want to bunch up they remained in formation behind the armored infantry, and when the armored doughs finally stopped against the ST EPVRE road, that left Company A completely exposed still in the open field. It was while exposed in this panicky predicament that an order came through to them directly that had a lot to do with saving them from even worse injury and did much to win the bridge and the town.

Lt Col Sterling Burnett, CO, 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry, stood in their midst and shouted: "Come on Able Company. Let's go!"

But before this order was received Anderson and the others remember that the medium tanks reached the bridge and went across. (For account of the tank sequence, see Company B, 68th Tank Battalion interview, also included in this series). The first tank, they learned as they crossed on foot a matter of minutes after the tanks, was halted just past the far side of the bridge and just short of the first house on the right. Only about fifty yards separated the bridge from the house. The second tank was stopped just on the far side of a road block the krauts had in the center of the bridge and the third tank right behind the second on the western side of the road block. They also remembered seeing one tank backing off the bridge that caused alarm among them. The thought went through all their minds, have the tanks received orders we haven't heard and are they pulling out and leaving us here alone? This was still while they lay on the forward slope. (As Company B 68th Tank Battalion interview reveals, the tank that withdrew had been hit and started to burn. The driver then chose to stay with and get the tank off the bridge.) The bridge was made of wood and would have burned up with the tank.

Anderson and Martin remembered that although the tanks were stopped on and near the bridge they were making good use of their weapons, both the 75mm's and the 30 caliber machine guns. The lead tank, just past the eastern end of the bridge was firing to the left front in the direction of the enemy machine gun emplacement. The second tank was firing to the right front into the town and the third tank was also firing to the left front in the same direction as the first tank.

Martin also recalled a peculiar incident. Before the tanks went across, he remembers seeing about three Krauts run across the bridge from the German to the American side and surrender. Anderson also remembers that about seven others gave up, but just where they came from he had no idea. (These apparently were the rifle and bazookamen lying in the foxholes along the bank of the western side of the river (the

American side) as the tanks went by them for the run across the bridge. Lt Vernon Edwards, tank platoon leader, proceeded to spray the holes with his grease gun from the turret of the second tank. Then they must have given up. See Company B, 68th Tank Battalion, for further details.)

In the initial charge for the bridge about fourteen Company A effectives made it across. (This figure is almost positive, for although they could not identify them all by name, between names and descriptions, they concluded almost positively that fourteen from the company crossed in the first wave.

Anderson stated that when Col Burnett gave the order to charge, he (Anderson) immediately jumped up and began to run as hard as he could to the bridge. He didn't realize the great distance to the span until he arrived. He estimated that the spot where he was finally lying still was some 150 yards to the bridge. The wooden bridge itself was only about 100 feet in length, but the swampland on either side of the river occasioned long built-up approaches leading to the bridge proper. So actually, from approach to approach, the bridge was some 150 to 200 yards across. Because of the swollen condition of the river created by the almost constant rain of the previous four or five days the river itself had spread over a width of some 400 yards.

Anderson stated that he was so exhausted by the long run to the approach to the bridge that he could only jog the rest of the way.

The seven men interviewed pieced the order of the crossing as follows:

First across was Sgt Royce, followed by S/Sgt Charles Parker also a squad leader in the 1st Platoon. Anderson was the third man across. Then came Pfc Howard Teichman, a rifleman in the first platoon. He was followed by Hyers and then Bailey. Captain Craig, the company commander, came next. Then followed Snellgroves, the assistant machine gunner, who had to carry the ammunition because the section's ammo bearer had become a casualty the day before. The tri-pod, which normally would be carried by



Snellgroves, was being lugged by Martin, the machine gun sergeant who followed Snellgroves. A soldier named Moses, the machine gunner, was carrying the receiver, but when he was hit by small arms on the bridge and was killed, Martin picked up the receiver and took it across too.

Following Martin was a soldier named Little, a BAR man who also got across. (The total names so far is who either got across or reached the bridge.)

Colonel Burnett did not cross the bridge. Shortly after the initial wave went over, he was struck by what the interviewees thought was small arms fire on the western edge of the bridge. He began to crawl back up the slope towards the rear when he was struck again, this time by flak, and called for the medics.

This incident was recounted by Cunningham, a member of the communications section of Company Headquarters. The word was passed back to the top of the hill over-looking the bridge shortly after the first group got across that a radio was needed for communications. Lt Rexford Hawkins, Company A executive officer, ordered the regular radio operator, packing a set on his back, to cross to the other side. But when he either refused to make the run or showed complete reluctance to go across (Cunningham did not know which) Hawkins asked Cunningham to take it over.

"Sir, I'll go as far as I can," Cunningham said he answered and started out. When he got to the base of the hill he jumped into a foxhole with an armored infantryman, but in so doing was hit in the leg by what he thought was flak. He then started back up the hill for aid leaving the radio in the hole for another man to take across. It was then that he saw and heard Col Burnett get hit by flak and cry for the medics. When Cunningham got to the top of the hill and went to the aid station, he was taken to the rear in the same jeep ambulance that carried the colonel, who had been picked up by the aid jeep as he lay near the road. He remarked that the colonel was still talking coherently at the aid station, but he did not know exactly how long a period passed before he died.



Cunningham, the only man talked to of the seven who did not get across the bridge, contributed one other interesting observation to the interview. A very serious soldier who appeared to be the type who made up for an apparent lack of education with native cunning and determination, said that before he made his run for the bridge he watched the Germans firing their flak guns from across the valley and saw our artillery range in on the enemy guns. (See 231st AFA Bn interview conducted by Lt S. J. Tobin with Lt Brown, FO). Cunningham said he saw helmets, parts of the gun and men fly into the air, a statement that coincides almost identically with the 231st AFA Bn observer, Lt Brown. Cunningham also stated that he could see German reinforcements being rushed up to the guns in an effort to keep them in operation.

While running across the bridge, Anderson remembered another incident that has stuck in his mind. Parker, just in front of him, had the misfortune to have his canteen jump out of the case, dropping on the bridge floor. Despite the fact enemy fire was falling all around, Anderson remembers that Parker stopped and hesitated over the canteen debating whether or not to pick it up. Parker then concluded his pause by saying: "Oh, fuck it," waving his hand at it in disgust, "I won't need it anyway," and then turned and ran on again, still ahead of Anderson.

When Royce and Parker got clear of the bridge and were confronted with going either to the right or left of the halted lead tank, they chose the left side. They drew fire but continued. Instinctively realizing this situation, Anderson, the third man, ducked to the right of the tank and did not get any fire. When he got to the first house on the right (the first house on the left was still another 30 yards or so ahead). Parker had gone in and Royce was standing outside waving him (Anderson) inside. The others went in also as they came up with the exception of Captain Craig. Craig went on to the first house on the left and Royce and Parker went with him. When Little, the BAR man, reached the door he was cut down by small arms fire that wounded

him in both knees.

He was brought into the house and probably because of Little that spot became the company aid station. Supervised by Anderson, a total of eight wounded were collected there before a peep ambulance arrived about 0300 hours the next morning, 12 November, and evacuated them back across the bridge. One of the eight wounded was a man named Tossie, Anderson remembered. He had been in the process of crossing when hit in the upper chest region. Anderson said Tossie told him later that when hit he had jumped over the wooded bridge rail and fell half in and half out of the flooded river. He lay there for something like two hours before he managed to crawl up towards the town and reached the first house on the right, the house that had been converted into an aid station.

Artillery fell on the town the rest of the daylight hours, it got dark almost at 1730 hours in those November days, but the most fearful German weapon the Company A men remember is the machine gun that was set up half-way up the hill on the east side of the bank to the left front as the men crossed. This was the gun that fired so effectively at the men crossing and also still could harrass them by firing between the houses on the left side and cover the main street through the town as they ran for cover. (HAN itself is a typical small, manure Lorraine village of not more than twenty buildings including the barns). The machine gun had the doorway of the first house on the right, the aid station, zeroed in.

Shortly after the men crowded into the first house on the right, they heard Captain Craig calling for them from the first house on the left, where he set up the Company CP. Craig wanted them up with him so he could spot them in the various village buildings for defensive reasons. Several of the men started out the door, but immediately were stopped, but not hit, by the German machine gunner.

Anderson then recounted how Martin, a peppery, little, young fellow who talks and acts fast, led the group out of the house by bolting for the door without hesitation

with both the tri-pod and the light 30 caliber carrier when the others showed fear. For some reason or other the German gun didn't fire at Martin or the others as they made their way to Craig.

Captain Craig then placed his few men, eighteen in all, in strategic positions in the houses outlining the town. He went down and ordered the tanks to pull into the town when he found it clear of enemy. He then had the tanks placed strategically at road junctions guarding the approaches. One of the most important posts was the one taken up by Cpl Bailey, armed with an M-1, and five others in the last house on the left of the main road on the eastern edge of the town. With Bailey was Sgt Parker, who stayed only for a short time, Nye, a BAR man whom none could quite fit into the picture as to when he crossed over the bridge, and three armored infantry men from the 6th Armored. (This was the first time armored infantrymen had definitely been proven to be over the bridge with the first wave. This fact could not be definitely established even at the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion CP several weeks before the interview with the Company A men. In addition Anderson knew of one other armored doughboy there, making eighteen on the east side of the bank.)

Bailey and Nye sprayed the trench to the left (north) of the town from where the effective Kraut machine gun fire was originating and put an end to that threat for good. (This trench later was used after dark by Company A when outposts for the night were set up. The trench was empty when Company A took it over, Hyers recalls.)

Bailey also remembers that one of the three armored infantry men had an "eagle" eye with the M-1 and effectively fired at and hit Krauts at 2 and 300 yards from the house.

Although the gauntlet of fire proved to be the hottest most of the men ran before or since the HAN action, once in the village no Krauts were seen by most of the men. Two direct encounters with German soldiers stand out amongst them, however, although only a few were in on the incidents.

Hyers was helping defend the village from the first floor of the house in which Craig had established the CP shortly after they arrived. Only one window, and it a poor one for reasons of position and a shutter he couldn't get rid of, afforded a view to the rear of the house (north) to cover the exposed flank. While observing he suddenly saw a German soldier walk right past the window not a foot from the wall. He hollered to both Parker and Royce to run to the rear, there was a kraut there. They came charging out the rear door and Parker collided with the German, who took off across the field. Parker then fired a couple of clips at the German with his M-1, and thinks he got him. Hyers mentioned that the reason Parker's shooting was so poor was because he had gotten his rifle back from ordnance just before the jump-off three days before and it had been returned without a rear sight.

The other incident occurred after dark when things began to quiet down, and the build-up of troops had started. Martin remembers that the tank platoon sergeant, (S/Sgt Everett Tourjee, now a lieutenant) was standing in the intersection of the town talking to a lieutenant colonel. About that time, a motorcycle came down into the town from the north (the ADAINCOURT (0546) road)). As it got closer and closer, Tourjee asked permission from the colonel to shoot the cycle and sidecar with two riders (Apparently Tourjee was still undecided whether or not they were friend or foe). The colonel replied: "Hell yes, shoot the son-of-a-bitches!" With that, Tourjee let go with his grease gun and literally cut the driver in half. The side-car rider jumped out and ran around a corner, bumping into a tank captain and breaking a field telephone set, Martin recalled. Martin didn't know whether or not the second German was hit by fire, although he and several others shot at him.

When questioned how he could be so positive it was Tourjee who fired the shots at the motorcycle, Martin left no argument about the authenticity of his opinion for he described Tourjee correctly (the interviewer knowing the tank Sgt) as being tall, very mild of speech and manner and bespectacled and concluded his statement with: " I got

to know him real well because right after that he brought out his little heater and cooked coffee. The guy had beacoup food in his tank." (To a man who hadn't eaten a bite of hot food in four days, this fell into the luxury class.)

Waldrum, in Company A's second platoon, was the last of the group interviewed to get across the bridge. He or none of the others present could estimate accurately when Waldrum came across in relation to the first wave, but they did know that it was after the tanks moved off the bridge and sometime before dark. Waldrum made the charge with three other doughboys out of the second platoon, but only he and one other made it across, the remaining two being hit on the bridge. Waldrum remembered that there were at least three other dead or wounded on the bridge at the time he crossed. The flak still was whistling over the bridge and they hit the bridge flooring at least twice. Before he made the run for the first house on the right, Waldrum dropped into a foxhole just past the bridge on the right side of the road. When things quieted down he made for the house.

The tankmen who were still to bring their vehicles across also must have heard about the dead and wounded on the bridge for Martin recalled that the word got to them not to expect any more tanks across until the bridge was cleared of the fallen men, "some of them may still be alive."

Another factor brought out in the interview, indicating that doughboys somehow manage to get scraps of information even during such terrible combat conditions as these, concerned a surrender party that went out from TF Godfrey back at Luppy the day before (See TF Godfrey interview regarding Captain Hammond venture). Anderson said they had heard a couple of officers from the 6th Armored Division had gone ahead from Luppy in an attempt to get the town of BECHY to surrender and had been captured. Anderson tied the incident together with the fact that when they first went into HAN they saw a peep on the road outside of the town which they presumed to be that of the missing Captain. When they fired on the vehicle, it made a get away.

Although they had become so intermingled with the tankers that they knew that situation almost entirely, the Company A doughs knew absolutely nothing about the engineers who cut the wires leading to charges on the bridge, ensuring that it would not be blown (See Company B, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion interview also included in this series). When asked if they knew anything about engineers cutting the wires, the only man who had even given it any thought was Martin who said he remembered seeing one soldier, obviously dead, lying on the wires with cutters in his hand. He said he understood that the dead man had been electrocuted. (This was not true, for it undoubtedly was Lt Daniel Nutter, Company B 25th Engineer Platoon leader, who cut the wires and was making his way back to the west side when he was cut down by small arms fire. He then was dragged out of the roadway back behind the road block by T/5 Charles Cunningham, on Nutter's platoon.)

After they had been over a while they remembered seeing Colonel John L. Hines, CGA commander, 6th Armored Division, come across with several doughs and then return and bring a few more over right after that.

After dark they also remember that the whole first battalion, more of the armor infantry and before dawn the rest of the regiment, came into HAN and pushed up and took the high ground east and north of the town to firmly establish the bridgehead.

Casualties for the 317th Infantry were 178 on the 11th of November. Broken down the figures showed:

	EM	0
KIA	11	0
MIA	3	0
DOW	2	1
WIA	94	2
IIA "	65	0
TOTALS *	175	3

" Injured In Action, which included trench foot cases. Personnel records showed that about 80 per cent of the 65 IIA cases were for trench foot, termed "immersion foot" on the records.

\* Because it was the 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry that ran into the real fighting

11 November, 317th Infantry officers estimated that at least 80 per cent of the casualties occurred in that battalion. Personnel records do not break the casualty figures down to battalions.

#### Facts about the Interviewees

Five of the seven men interviewed have received Purple Hearts. The only two who have not, Anderson and Hyers, were given thirty day furloughs to the States early in December for meritorious performance at HAN. They did not get back until the first week in April and consequently missed all the tough Bastogne Bulge action and most of the subsequent sweep across Germany.

All seven men talked to, plus Royce and Parker, received Bronze Star awards for their action at HAN, which seemed to under rate the value of their undertaking considerably as far as the interviewer is concerned. Captain Craig, whose recommendation was put in by Colonel Hines of the 6th Armored, received a DSC for his work. At the time of the interview, a DSC recommendation for a posthumous award to Colonel Burnett had been submitted but nothing had been heard from the recommendation to date.

Out of curiosity the critical scores of these unquestioned veterans were obtained. Until the additional ten points for the latest two campaigns are obtained, only one of the seven have more than 85 points. When the 10 points do come through only two of the seven will have more than 85, which tends to bear out the argument that no matter what system for discharge is employed, there will always be unfairness in some individual cases. (This seeming unfairness was not voiced by the men; the subject was not discussed.)

The present point scores:

Snellgroves	101
Bailey	79
Cunningham	74
Martin	61
Waldrum	55
Anderson	44
Hyers	38



SKETCH TO ACCOMPANY  
 CO A, 317A INF HAN-SUR-NIED  
 INTERVIEW - NOT TO SCALE

