

Case
UNIT: Co A 1st Bn 317th Inf Regt, 80th Inf Div

PERIOD: 11 Nov 1944

ACTION: LORRAINE Campaign (Crossing of the NIED River)

SOURCE: 1st Lt Rexford Hawkins, CO Co A, then Co Exec

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: ST AVOLD, FRANCE, Co A CP
16 Dec 1944

INTERVIEWER: Lt S. J. Tobin

MAP:

Note: *No words were used during the interview.*

At 0830 on the morning of 11 Nov, the 1st Bn 317th Inf left LUPPY (982434). Co A was the leading company. Just before reaching BECHY (999439) the infantry came across elements of the 6th Armd Div. A number of tanks were in position on the ridge at (010440) and other tanks were in the nearby fields. Two tanks had ran into a mine field west of the town and were damaged. Elements of Co A moved on into the town. Orders from Bn were received not to enter, but before they could be transmitted to the men over the 536 radio, one platoon was already in the town. The artillery had laid down several concentrations during the morning and the tanks had fired their MGs into the village. As the infantry moved in about a platoon of the enemy including an SS Captain surrendered to the men of Co A without resistance.

At 1100 they moved out following in the 6th Armd Div column in the direction of HAN sur NIED. The company moved along on foot behind the first group of half-tracks of the 9th AIB. Some light tanks formed the point and a platoon of medium tanks was on either side of the road for flank protection. As the column moved on the tanks shot up the edges of the woods along the way with their MGs.

When they reached the woods in the vicinity of (035444), the armored units were forming up to attack the bridge at HAN sur NIED, the time was about 1230. The armored infantry dismounted and fanned out along the road and A Co formed a staggered line behind them. At about 1245 they jumped off in attack on the bridge. When the leading elements reached a point some 400 yards from the bridge, the Germans opened up with everything, MGs, small arms and a hail of 20mm AA fire.

At the time the 1st platoon of Co A was moving down the right side of the road, the 2d platoon on the left, the 3d platoon was in reserve and the weapons platoon was on the right side of the road following the first. The Co CP group was in the orchard on the left side of the road near the cemetery (041442). At the moment Capt Craig was with the CP group in the orchard. He directed Lt Hawkins, his Exec, to take over while he went forward with the men. One of the platoon leaders, Lt Cooper, was hit and Capt Craig went to his aid. A runner came back from the 1st platoon with orders to have the heavy MG platoon brought up to the front. They reported that they were receiving sniper and MG fire from the flanks as well as the AA fire from across the river.

The forward slope of the hill offered practically no cover whatsoever. The only places of refuge were the shallow ditches on each side of the road. The men were crowding into the ditches and freezing. Many of them were hit and crying for the medics. The enemy was running 20mm fire up and down the road and on the men in the ditches. The men in the leading platoon shouted to the armored infantrymen to move up, however they did not move. Meanwhile Capt Craig moved down to the leading platoon and shouted "Lets go". The men jumped up and ran about 25 yards and hit the dirt under a hail of fire. Then, responding to Capt Craig's encouragement they circled to the right and by fire and movement reached the railroad embankment on the west side of the river, a short distance from the bridge.

Lt Hawkins said that about 1400 he saw Lt Col Burnett coming up the slope along the road and heard him shout "Come on Able Co lets go" and wave the men on. A fire fight continued throughout the afternoon until about dusk. Information was received during the afternoon that a number of men from A Co crossed the bridge and were in the town under command of Capt Craig. Shortly after dark Lt Hawkins moved the CP group across the bridge and into the town of HAN sur NIED¹. Capt Craig, who had been made Bn commander after Col Burnett had been wounded during the afternoon, made Lt Hawkins CO of Co A and instructed him to take the available men left from A Co and defend the left sector of the town toward the north for the night.