

On the 5th and 6th of September two abortive attempts at forcing the MOSELLE in assault boats were made at BLENOD and VANDIERES. Census: 38 assault boats destroyed. The troops withdrew to make thorough preparation and reconnaissance for a third attempt to be made at DIEULOUARD on the 12th of September.

In the DIEULOUARD area the MOSELLE RIVER follows a winding course northward through a flat floodplain bordered on the East by a series of fairly steep heights which dominate the western banks of the river. From these heights the Germans were able to obtain perfect observation of all activity on the opposite side.

Along the western bank of the river there is a canal, fifty feet in width, five in depth. Between the river and canal is an eight foot dyke similar in appearance to the hedgerows of NORMANDY. This dyke rises abruptly from the canal and river bottom. Because of the varying water level its banks, and those of the canal and river, are very muddy. In rainy weather the entire area becomes a veritable mire.

Opposite DIEULOUARD the river forms two arms which wind around a flat island several hundred yards wide at its widest point. This terrain affords no cover. One macadam road traverse the island.

Characteristics of the MOSELLE: Average width 150 feet; Variable depth 6 to 8 feet; Rate of current 5 miles per hour; Bottom firm, but muddy; Low banks but bulldozing necessary; Available fords for foot elements, but perilous for tracked vehicles because of mud. Two characteristics especially affected operations: the quick flow and the tendency of the water level to change overnight. For instance on the 6th at BLENOD a dam below the crossing site had been opened increasing the speed of the current to such an extent that many assault boats were carried downstream off their planned course.

Original plan: The assault waves of infantry were to jump off at 0400, 12th, September. The artillery to open up at 0415. For close-in support 20 50 Cal machine guns and 30 30 Calibres were emplaced along the forward slope of the BOIS DE CULTE at the edge of the wood. The guns were dug in by infantry, manned by personnel from the 167th and 248th Engr C Battalions.

*Interview by Sgt. Angulo.*

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MOSELLE CROSSING: Engineers (2)

The 305th Engineer Bn, 80th Inf Div, was responsible for crossing the foot elements, the 1117th Engr Group for the vehicular traffic. Company B, 305th, was to guide the assault waves of the 317th Inf across the ford North of the island at (784-301). A Company, 305th, was to guide the 3rd Battalion over the canal and both arms of the river at the island, the first arm to be forded at 784-286, the second arm at 791-295. In crossing the 2nd Battalion at 784-301 17 plywood assault boats were employed to reach the far bank of the river. 17 boats are sufficient to cross a rifle company. After the assault Co B, 305th, with the aid of one platoon, Co C, was to footbridge the canal and river. Then Co A, 167th Engr Bn, was to bridge the canal and river with an infantry support bridge, Class 9 sufficient capacity for halftracks and heavy trucks, but insufficient for Sherman tanks. Co B, 167th Engr Bn, was to construct a pneumatic float bridge across the canal at the island sight. Based on information received from a Frenchman, fords over both arms were expected, many over near arm, one over the far arm. It was planned to throw the heavy pontoons across later in the day on the 12th when possibly the area would be out of range of the enemy artillery.

The operation went according to plan until 0930, 12th. A ford had been located over the near arm, none over the far arm. It was doubtful if the near ford could hold up under sustained use. Gen McBride, CG 80th Div, ordered that the canal, and both river arms be bridged with heavy pontoons as soon as possible.

Company A, 557th Heavy Ponton Bn, 1117th Engr Group, commenced work on the canal bridge at 1000, completed at 1300. On completion of the canal bridge Co B, 557th Heavy Ponton Bn, crossed the canal, forded the near arm and commenced work on the far arm at 1600. Co A then worked on the heavy ponton across the near arm. Near arm bridge, commenced at 1300, completed at 1800. Far arm bridge, commenced at 1600, completed at 2000. An attempt to ford the far arm with an armored dozer was made during the afternoon, but failed. At 2000 the canal and both arms were bridged. The tanks commenced crossing. The three heavy pontoons had been put in under constant shell fire and intermittent small arms fire in addition to the everpresent mine menace.

MOSELLE CROSSING:Engineers (3)

The night of the 12th it was decided to put in second heavy ponton bridge over the far arm, 300 yards downstream from the other bridge. It was a night job. It was ready for traffic in the early morning of the 13th. On the 15th it was decided to put in a third heavy ponton over the far arm to take advantage of the macadam road across the island. This was the fifth heavy ponton bridge. The canal bridge and the second over the far arm were dismantled to provide material for this final job.

Originally the Corps Order called for a crossing between BELLVILLE and DIEULOUARD. Factors conditioning the choice of the DIEULOUARD site:

1.Availability of approaches to the river. 2.Proximity to possible fording sights.3.Location of macadam road across the island. The enemy artillery was well-zeroed in on all the likely and established crossing sights. Thus the inherent disadvantages of the island sight,namely the requisite two crossings,were counterbalanced by the abovementioned factors.

(The above summary was based on interviews with Col Lovett,CO 1117th Engr Group;Major Brooks,CO 557th Hvy Pont Bn;Major R.R.McCorkle,Exec O,248 Engr Bn; Capt E.H Cockrell,248 Engr Bn,Major Leonard W. Petersen,Group Operations Officer; Capt Paul Cote,CO,Co B,167th Engr Bn;Major Charles G Croker,305th Engr Bn.

These interviews were conducted by T/Sgt C.J.Angulo.)