

Moselle River Operation
80th Infantry Division
4-15th Sept 44

A Brief Terrain Analysis :

A study of the terrain of that portion of the sector within the 80th Infantry Division boundary lines east and west, for the Moselle River Crossing, will reveal the secret of the German defense in the face of superior strength.

Moving east from a line Montsec, on the north, Beaumont, to Menil aa Tour, on the south, we find land which defies secrecy of movement. Here there is a rolling plane, dominated frequently by out-cropping mountains, again by broad expanses of open terrain comparatively flat. The woods are not generously spread over the land in small clumps, but rather are found in tight, deep forrests of from one mile to several ^{deep} ~~deep~~.

Mountains predominate in the area of Thiaucourt, on the north, and around Martincourt on the south. There are flatter, near-plains to the south of Bernecourt, of course, where today one may observe concrete fortifications, a part of the old defense system, and the broad mine belts of the past. The ground approaching the river is certainly not a plateau, nor yet a valley. It strikes its mean elevation through low rolling hills, approximately 330 feet. It manifests itself in steeper descents, in cuts and draws, each seemingly turned to face Mousson Hill across the river, as it drops off abruptly to the flood plain of the Moselle.

North to south, along the west bank of the river, for the most part, one to two kilometers from the river itself, are the screening woods of the Forêt de Vanchères, Bois le Pretre, Forêt de Puvenelle, and the tiny Bois de Coute. It is, however, the roads and approaches between these forrests, which are canalized from the flatter areas to the west through the draws, which approach the river, under the direct observation of the enemy, which present the problem to the attacking force. From seats on the dominating east bank, where the hills, Mousson, St. Genevieve, and the Falaise to the south, strike a mean elevation of 370 and 380 feet, the enemy can look onto the stage of the flood plain of the river, and up the roads to the west to Limey and Flirey and observe our approaching columns. Every draw and gully here was reported, after the operation, as "zeroed in".

Crossing the dual waterway, canal, then river, within a few hundred yard of each other at the farthest point, one passes over a broad flood plain which has a few scattered trees, but for the most part consists of scrub grass and mud in rainy weather. Beyond the east bank of the Moselle, between Pagny-sur-Moselle and Dieulouard, there extends in general a flat or gentle sloping plain for two-hundred yards. Then the slope becomes very steep, varying in grade from approximately 30 degrees on Mousson Hill on the north to fifteen or twenty degrees near St. Genevieve and Bezaumont on the south.

6 In the vicinity of Landremont and Ville-au Val, the high ground is St. Genevieve Hill to the north, 380 feet; Landremont at 300, on a lower extension of Genevieve; Ville-au-Val on the lower slope of the hill dominated by Genevieve and Landremont, with planes to the west and draws between Ville-au-Val and the key feature, the FALAISE, which, with the exception of Mousson, overlooks all on the south, offering superiority to its occupant/.