

From Celebration to Confrontation, Bar-Le-Duc to Moselle Firing Positions

From Les Grandes Loges, the 314th travelled some 55 miles southeast through Chalons, Pogne, Lisse, Bassu, Villers and about 1800 on Aug. 31, arrived at the assembly area, Rancourt (2 miles west of Revigny) to support the 318th's advance on Bar-Le-Duc.

In reconnoitering for a suitable area in which to deploy the Battalion, the Battalion and Battery Commanders entered and liberated Bar-Le-Duc three hours before the infantry arrived. They were mobbed by celebrating French civilians whose exuberance knew no bounds. Simeon Hutcheson remembers that: "At Bar-Le-Duc the people were so jubilant they brought out the champagne for us, not just regular wine, as we were the first American troops in the town."

As Mike Heneghan recalls that occasion: "The 318th was to take Bar-Le-Duc and then continue on to Commercy. That was a long way for them to walk from the detrucking points, some 20 miles rearward. In this type of advance in which the Artillery would be following walking infantry, the Colonel always liked to ride up near the infantry with the Battalion following some distance behind, or advancing from one assembly area to another. He would designate check points and we would mark them on our maps. I remember on this move the center of Bar-Le-Duc was check point No. 13. As the Colonel would pass a check point he would call out the number. When the Battalion crossed it, we would do the same. In that way we could keep from getting too close or lagging too far behind. We did this for a while, then the Colonel started calling out the numbers in rapid succession, 8-9-10. I knew it was impossible for the infantry to be covering the distances involved that rapidly on foot and assumed that the Colonel was driving on ahead of the column. Then I received a call from him to come forward. I did, and my assumption had been correct, he was out in front of everyone. When I met him he said that word from the civilians was that the Germans had left and were racing out the other end of town and to go on in. So I went on ahead and thought the other BC's were coming up too. As I rode into the town, it was very quiet and all of the shutters were closed. As soon as I had circled around the town square, shutters and doors began to open and people began pouring out of the houses and plying us with flowers, fruit, eggs, wine and you name it. I kissed people from six to sixty. It was a wild town.

"Knowing the infantry still were a long way off, I called on the radio and told the Battery to pull off the road and wait, for if the Germans came back and we were caught in the town, it would be more than we could handle. I didn't stay in town very long and returned to the Battery for the night. I'm not sure what the other batteries did but I believe Headquarters was in the town.

"The next morning 1st Sgt. Frank Knott and I went into town to see what was going on. Much was, but hardly what we expected. The towns people had taken those women who had fraternized with the Germans, cut off their hair, stripped them naked and were chasing them up and down the streets. Sergeant Knott was truly shocked. He said he had never seen anything like that before."

John Beard, (Ln O. with the 318th Inf.) says: "By the time we arrived the party was really in full swing and continued on throughout the night. It was like Mardi Gras or the wildest Times Square New Years Eve celebration. A six



314th enters Bar-le-Duc

months supply of wine must have been consumed. I remember having some apprehensions because if there were a counterattack there wouldn't be very many capable of shooting much less aiming their rifles."

Frank Lankford remembers the town from a different perspective, however. "One of the towns that I remember very well is Bar-Le-Duc. It had a long (about 3 blocks) square and was about a block wide. There were two tall columns on each side of the street at the entrance to the square. When "Sv Btry" went through late the next afternoon, there were a dozen or more German soldiers in a group with some FFI (French Forces of the Interior) guarding them. About an hour or so later, Lt. (Edward) Bar caught up to us and was talking about seeing some dead German soldiers in the square in the center of town. I told him the soldiers were standing in a group when we came through. He replied they were not standing when he came through."

Frances Neighly recalls: "Somewhere in the vicinity of Bar-Le-Duc, we had overrun a freight train filled with German rations and supplies. I got a big wheel of swiss cheese and put it in the truck. A few days later, we (C Btry) had just moved into a new position very early one morning and I had gone down to the truck from the gun position to cut off a hunk of cheese when suddenly John Duffy yelled 'Hit the ground!' I jumped and the next thing I knew Duffy and Phillip Updike were standing behind and had their rifles on a German soldier who was hidden in some brush nearby. We had a prisoner and Duffy was so excited he shook. We took the soldier to a stockade where there were Frenchmen at each corner with machine guns and all of the German prisoners were clustered in the center."

As the infantry moved on toward Commercy, the 314th, on Sept. 1, proceeded to Fains-Les Sources (about a mile northwest of Bar-Le-Duc), then displaced to a position three miles west of Commercy. On Sept. 2, the 314th displaced to a position about two miles northwest of Vignot and remained there until Sept. 4. During the night of Sept. 3, enemy aircraft appeared over the Battalion area and two bombs were dropped approximately 500 yards from "C" Btry's position.

John Beard says he believes it was in this general area that the Division literally ran off the map. At least the large scale ones that were used by "the troops." The advance eastward was so rapid new maps, like other supplies, did not keep pace. For several days no useful maps were available. Then for a few more days they were available only in limited numbers.

John also wonders if anyone else remembers the "Burma Shave type" sign that the 4th Armored Division engineers had placed on a stack of booby-trapped lumber near the bridge in Commercy. It read: "Lift the Board and See the Lord - Mines."

This area holds a happy memory for Michael Zizaro (Hq Btry), who says: "Somewhere near the city of Commercy, Capt. Cole (Div. Arty. Chief of the Air Section) flew General Searby into our air strip in his L-5 plane. Capt. Cole asked Lt. Kenyon if he could get someone to drive the General to the Div. Arty. Advance C.P. Lt. Kenyon asked me to get my jeep and we three took off. Gen. Searby sat in front and gave me directions. When we got there the General thanked us and hopped out of the jeep. While walking away with those

long strides of his, the General was saying something which neither Lt. Kenyon nor I understood. I asked the Lieutenant if the general asked us to wait, and he said he didn't think so.

"We drove back to the air strip and the following day Lt. Kenyon got word from Headquarters that Gen. Searby said we had 'dry gulched' him at the Div. Arty. C.P.

"I guess we were supposed to have waited for him. Anyway no harm was done, and I was thrilled to have met and driven Gen. Edmund W. Searby."

From Vignot the battalion, on Sept. 4, moved some 20 miles into a bivouac in the Bois de Minorville (about 12 miles northwest of Nancy).

From the Commercy area, the 80th's drive toward the Moselle was launched with the three regiments abreast, the 317th on the left, the 319th on the right, and the 318th in the center. The mission was to cross rapidly and continue eastward.

On Sept. 4, the 317th advanced to a position just west of Pont-a-Mousson and prepared for an attack across the Moselle. CCA of the 4th Armored, with the 1st Bn. 318th attached, was to follow as soon as a bridgehead was established. On Sept. 5, the 317th attempted a crossing without an artillery preparation, hoping to gain surprise. It was repulsed, as were two more assaults, by heavy small arms, mortar and artillery fire. Efforts to cross again on the 6th were likewise unsuccessful. Two companies did manage to get to the east side, but were forced back across the river by heavy enemy pressure. Crossing the Moselle was going to be tougher than expected. In fact, for the next few days, until the 12th, the 317th had to continue mopping up operations on the west side while making preparations for a coordinated assault crossing.

On the right, the 319th successfully crossed the Moselle on Sept. 4 and seized its objective, the high ground east of Toul. However, the next day (Sept. 5) it was unable to reach its final objectives, Gondreville and Villey Le Sec, which the enemy had established as strong points in its defensive line. Efforts to reach these objectives again on the 6th failed. Then for the next few days the 319th made limited expansions of the bridgehead.

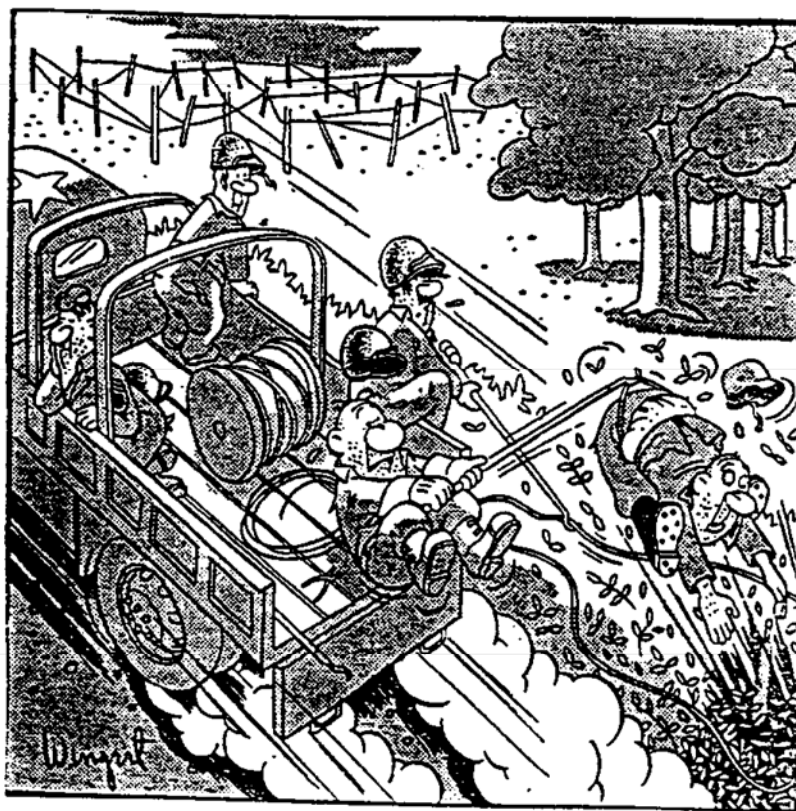
Col. Minahan reminisces: "I'll never forget the night I almost led the battalion into the enemy front lines. On Sept. 4 we had gone into bivouac in the Bois de Minorville, about 10 miles west of the Moselle and 12 miles northwest of Nancy. The 318th Inf was directed to move eastward that night along the road to Marbach, which is on the river, and capture Marbach before the German's could organize a defense. The 314th FA was ordered to follow the 318th Inf along that same highway after crossing a designated IP -- a road section about 2 miles west of Saizerais -- and go into a Div Arty designated assembly area just west of Marbach. We moved out on schedule and proceeded east in semi-darkness. The moon was just beginning to rise. I was leading in my command car when I spotted the flashes of machine gun fire about 1000 yards off to my right. It was firing to our right rear toward Saizerais.

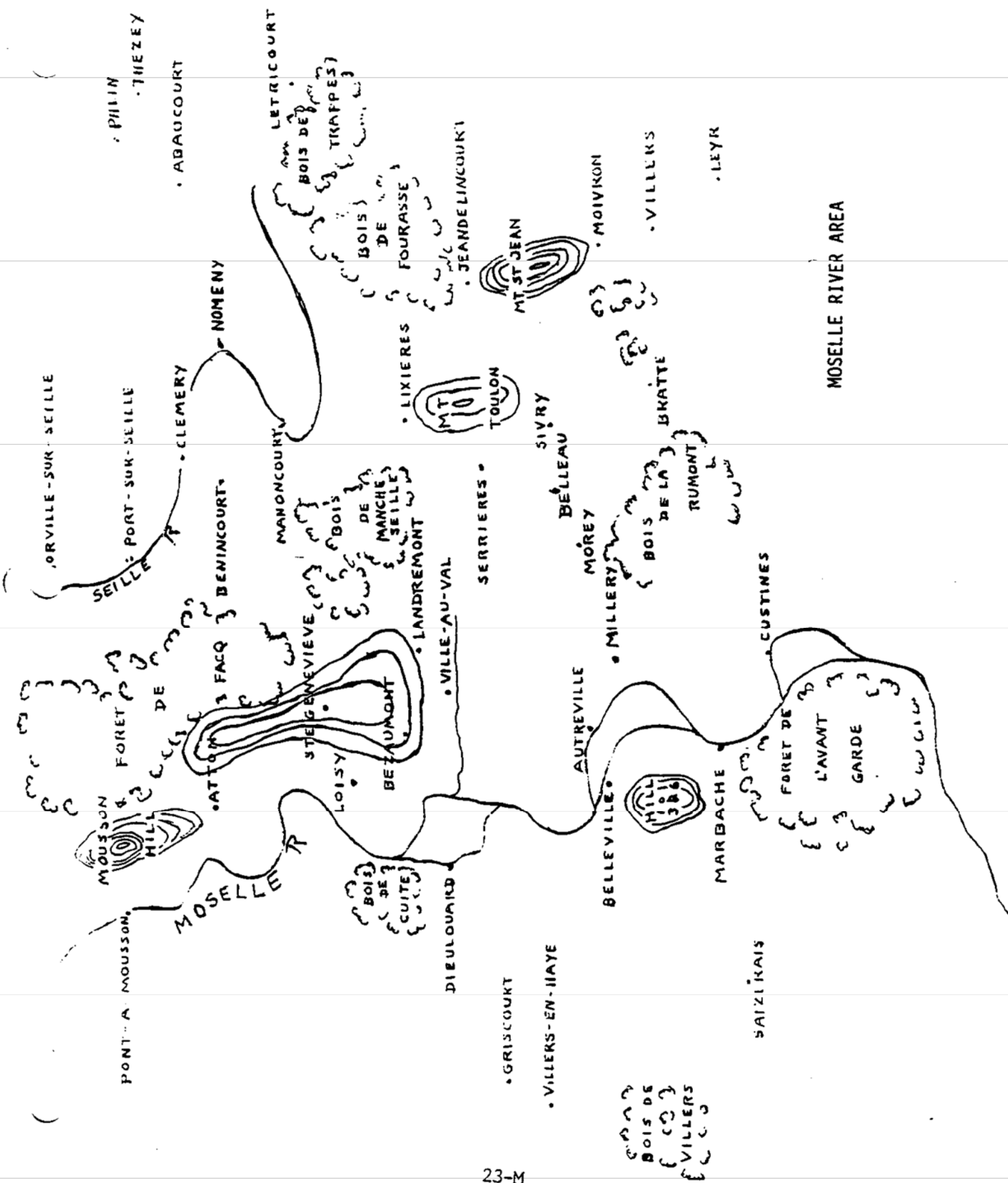
Instantly, I knew, not only were we ahead of the infantry, we were behind the German line of outposts.

"I halted the column, told Bn Exec, Maj (James) Roark, to lead the battalion in a U-turn back to a road intersection which I pointed out on the map, and that I'd meet him there. Then I jumped in with 'Hq' BC Capt (Robert) Thurston, and as we slowly drove rearward I said, 'Pass the word to every driver to make a U-turn in place after the driver head, BC's follow me.' Only Mike Heneghan, BC 'B', indicated he'd seen what I had seen. About a mile back I stopped, pointed out firing positions on the map, then pointed to their general direction on the ground in the moonlight, told them to reconnoiter, send guides back to the intersection, upon occupation to establish local security, and be prepared to defend positions with direct fire.

"The battalion responded perfectly, quietly, and professionally to a man in this unusual night time occupation of position. Some of you will recall taking, as PW's, German patrols and outposts found in your battery areas.

"Daybreak revealed that the Bn CP and, as I recall, 'C' Btry were without defilade and had to be moved to alternate positions before the enemy took action. The area known as Bois de Villers proved to be ideal for the 314th FA support of the 318th Inf attack on the high wooded ground called Foret de L'Avant Garde south of Marbache, which proved to be no easy task, and later in support of the 317th and 318th attacks to secure the Moselle bridgehead. From this position a total of 2,542 rounds were fired between Sept. 5-12."





The 318th (- 1st Bn), in the center of the Division's zone, advanced to the east and on the 5th launched an attack on Hill 326 (between Belleville and Marbach) with elements of the 3rd Bn. Meeting heavy resistance, only limited progress was made. The Hill was taken the next day however, and an attack launched against hostile forces in and around the Forest De L'Avant Garde. In the ensuing days it continued mopping up operations on the west side of the Moselle and seized Marbach and Belleville.

"It was in the area just west of the Moselle," says John Beard, "that I quickly learned to hate fighting in woods. My first, of several experiences in that area, was in the general vicinity of Marbach and might have been in the Forest de L'Avant Garde. The infantry I was with had advanced several hundred yards into a rather dense forest when suddenly we were pinned down by heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire from very close range. I was lying beside a tree. The Company Commander was crowded up next to me on the opposite side. I seemed to be in the direct line of fire of a machine gun or other automatic weapon for its frequent bursts were striking the tree just a few inches above my head sending chips of bark trickling down the back of my neck. It tickled but I dared not move. Fearing the operator of the weapon might lower his sights before I could change my position, I, ever so carefully, eased my right arm under my chest and slowly unzipped my jacket so I would be closer to the ground. In retrospect it seems silly but at the time it made a lot of sense."

During this period enemy artillery shells frequently landed throughout the Battalion area almost from the time of the initial occupation, but damage was minimal. One shell hit approximately half way between "A" Btry's motor park and "B" Btry's kitchen area sending shell fragments through the kitchen truck but causing no personnel injuries. What we did not realize was that the Germans taken prisoner during occupation of the battery positions were part of the defense outpost. Some must have eluded us and got back to report our positions.

Harry Rockwell (B Btry) says he will never forget this area. "Somewhere just after Bar-Le-Duc, I was in a truck pulling a howitzer and just as we positioned in a wheat field, the Germans opened up on us with 88's. It was my first experience under fire and I will admit that I was scared. I jumped off the truck so fast I lost my helmet and gas mask. I laid flat on the ground for a minute and then crawled under the truck. Our kitchen truck nearby was blown up."

Francis Neighly also recalls: "We (C Btry) had gone into position in a vineyard near the top of a hill. We must have been under enemy observation for we soon started receiving a lot of artillery fire. I think this is where "B" Btry's kitchen truck was hit. A little later we moved down the hill a short distance where we had better defilade."

The 314th After Action Report records that on Sept. 5 Pfc. Harold D. Topping (C Btry) was wounded by gun shot and T/4 Fred T. Buchanan (A Btry) wounded by artillery fire. On the 7th, T/5 Edward R. Baratta (B Btry) was wounded by shell fragments while serving as radio operator with the FO Crew in the Forest de L'Avant Garde.

Hubert Kenyon recalls that "After six or seven weeks of "K", "C" and "10 in 1" rations, the Air Section scrounged up a piece of armor plate taken from a shot down fighter plane. We dug some potatoes in a nearby field, got fresh eggs from somewhere, took the bacon from a "10 in 1" ration and using the armor plate as a grill had the best damned meal we ever ate."

The Air Sections disenchantment with the routine chow was pretty much shared by all, and any deviation was looked upon with great relish. A package from home with assorted goodies (and maybe a pack or two of Wings or Spuds) was always a most welcomed supplement for the monotonous diet. In Bill Whiteside's Liaison Section everyone not only looked forward to receiving their own boxes, but eagerly awaited those for Anthony Di Pangrazio as well. His boxes were a delight indeed, containing such exotic items as spaghetti, tomato sauce, salami, pepperoni and various cheeses. He would prepare a good Italian meal as soon as the tactical situation would permit. We never knew where he got the chickens, bread, and wine that often complemented our "C's" and "K's" and didn't ask, although everyone strongly suspected that Paul McAndrew was involved in some way.

"During the Division's mopping up operations west of the Moselle and the later attack across the river," Arthur Lindberg recalls, "The Air Section was very active in directing artillery fire along the entire front assigned to the 314th. We had very long days, flying from dawn to dusk, up to 14 or more hours per day. I would fly first with Lt. Kenyon until it was time to return to the air strip and then immediately go up again with Sgt. Rebensdorf while Kenyon's plane was being serviced for the next trip. This practice was followed for several weeks until the river crossing was secured."

As soon as all preparations for the river crossing were completed, Division issued a Field Order providing for an attack across the Moselle in the vicinity of Dieulouard, and the establishment of a bridgehead from Pont-a-Mousson to Millery. The 317th was to seize the high ground across the river from Dieulouard. The 318th (minus the 1st Bn which was attached to the 4th Armored Division) was to cross later and move north to the high ground east of Pont-a-Mousson.

Russell Litchfield well remembers that: "About 2200 on a dark September night I got a call from the CP to stack our supply of ammunition and go back to the Corp depot near Commercy for a resupply. After no little grumbling on the part of some of the men, we set out for the depot. The duty officer roused out a reluctant squad to load our trucks. We had just started when 'Bed Check Charlie' droned overhead. I never heard such a discharge of pistols and carbines. We ducked for cover, not from the plane but from the barrage of small arms fire from the depot personnel, which did nothing to preserve the secrecy of the site. We finally got the squad back to loading our trucks, and we arrived back at the battery and into our sleeping bags about 0300. At about 0600 the field phone rang. Major (James) Roark wanted to see Lt. Litchfield at the CP immediately. I could not imagine what the problem was. At the CP the Major informed me that Div Arty was very upset because the 314th had all of the ammunition allotted to the Division at that time. We were to share our 'cake' with the 313th and the 905th and never, never, draw ammunition without an allocation from Div Arty. It was a tough way to learn how Corps Arty and Div Arty allocate ammo to battalions."