

**Combat Interviews
of the
5th Infantry Division:
Moselle River Crossing
8 September-24 September 1944**

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NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT YET COMPLETE. THIS TRANSCRIPTION IS WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AS OF 16 APRIL 2024. This transcription's priority is the Dornot Bridgehead. So, those interviews will be transcribed first. Of the 119 pages of the PDF, the current stopping point is on page 101.

Transcribed from the original documents that in 2010 were in Folder CI 38 in Box 18959 (Combat Interviews) of Record Group 407 (Adjutant General's Office) at National Archives II in College Park, MD by Wesley Johnston, son of Walter G. Johnston Jr. of the 1st Squad, Anti-Tank Platoon, Company B, 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division.

The original spellings and format are generally retained in the transcript. Word wrap in which a line of text continues to the next line is not necessarily as in the original. Words run together are separated in the transcription. In some cases in the transcription, the font size is reduced from the original, in order to keep each page together.

If there is any question of accuracy, see the scanned images of the original documents at <https://www.7tharmdiv.org/docrep/images/US-Non-7AD/5th%20Inf%20Div/RG%20407-Ent%20427A-Box%2018959-Folder%20CI%2038-5ID%20Moselle.pdf>

5TH INFANTRY DIVISION
Moselle River Crossing
8 September-23 September 1944

Interviews in considerable detail on a difficult river crossing. Large amount of combat detail at company and platoon level.

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MOSELLE RIVER CROSSING

AT

ARNAVILLE

8 SEPTEMBER 1944 - 20 SEPTEMBER 1944

PHASES:

- I. Reconnaissance and Preliminary Crossing at Dornot by the 11th Infantry
- II. River Crossing at Arnaville
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I. Reconnaissance and Preliminary Crossing at Dornot by the 11 Infantry Regiment

By the 6th, September, it was evident that the Germany Army was in position to defend Metz. From Verdun, where the main force of the XX Corps was stalled without gasoline, Reconnaissance had been sent to zones Northwest of Metz to seize and hold bridges over the Moselle River. On the 1st September one platoon of the 3rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, lead by Lt. Jackson reached Thornville and held the bridge there for three hours before the German garrison could recover from the surprise and force the platoon out. Other reconnaissance parties of the 3rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Group were at Briey and Mars la Tour, from the 2nd September, while two platoons were observing the Moselle itself from secret positions at Hauconcourt and . These units reported that the German garrison in Metz was panaced in the fact of the Third Army force in Verdun, but when a thrust on Metz did not develop by the 3rd and 4th, they mobilized all available units, including the OCS and NCO school personnel at Metz and some battalions of physically unfit, reinforced these ranks with SS men from the 17th SS Panzer Division, brought up additional artillery and blew the critical Moselle bridges. By the 5th September the fortress positions were manned and equipped, and a defensive screen had been thrown into the approaches.

On the 5th a platoon of the 3rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron attempting to force an approach to Metz directly from the West was shelled heavily from Fort Jean d'Arc. On the 6th five Task Forces of the 3rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Group

tested the Metz defences West of the Moselle. One Force, led by Lt. Col. Wallach, commander of the 3rd Cav Sq reached Arnaville on the South but was forced to retire in the face of point blank 88mm fire from high ground on the opposite shore. Another Force reached the Moselle in the vicinity of Hauconcourt on the North. The other Forces were stopped on an arc reaching as far west as Gravelote.

How strongly the Germans were prepared to defend Metz was not yet known. Information had been received about the enter-locked fortress system around the city, a system was first built in 1869 and redesigned in 1939 by French Engineers to withstand siege by modern artillery and air bombardment. In the few weeks of August, 1944, the Germans had added to the defences. The Moselle River itself, flanked by heights commanding rolling open valleys and fields, was a good defensive terrain. The Germans knew this terrain thoroughly. The Metz area had been used for manoeuvres by the Service Schools. We had no detailed information on the fortresses or the terrain. The best maps available at the time were 1:50000.

On the 5th September the 7th Armored Division and the Fifth Infantry Division was brought up to positions on North and South of Mars la Tour. Major General W. A. Walker ordered a frontal attack with the armor leading. CCA supported by the 2nd Infantry were to take the high ground Northwest of the Mars la Tour - Metz road, while CCb supported by the 11th Infantry was to attack the area Southwest of this road. This plan of attack, begun 7th September was stopped in the face of Fort Jean d'Arc in the North, while on the South it was pressed to the right,

where the 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion and the 1st and 3rd Battalion, 11 Infantry, after passing through a light defensive screen reached Dornot on the Moselle five miles South of Metz.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions, 11 Infantry had reached objectives on the high ground North and South of Dornot at 2200, 7 September. The plan was for the 2nd Battalion to force a crossing of the Moselle that night while 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion crossed at a site 1000 yds to the North. The 23rd, which was to cross first, was later ordered to cross at the site selected by the 2nd Battalion. They crossed about 40 men of two Companies, and then had to hold operation in the face of enemy fire. At 0930, 8 September, the 7 Armored Division was ordered by XX Corps to clear the area and move North to attempt a crossing according to the original plan, while the 2nd Battalion moved up to make their crossing. Enemy artillery and small arms harassed this operation. Three battalions of light and medium artillery fired heavy preparations, but point targets could not be located. At 1115 F Company, with 1st Lt Nathan F Drake in the lead boat jumped off in a wave of five assault boats. G Company followed immediately and were across by 1320. Both Companies had a section of HMG's and a section of 81mm mortars which they immediately set up in the wooded area on the far shore. E Company crossed late in the afternoon and K Company at 1800 with other units of the 11 Infantry prepared to cross as soon as the beachhead was secured. All the companies crossing, C Company, 7th Engineer C Battalion, manning the assault boats, and the units in support

on the near shore were receiving heavy casualties from enemy fire.

F and G Companies, once across, advanced rapidly directly East and uphill toward the Fort Verdun Group. Information of the strength of the Fort had not been available. F Company with covering fire from G Company cut thru five separate double apron fences approaching the Fort and came against an iron barred fence studded with curved iron hooks which prevented scaling. On the other side of the fence a dry moat dropped an estimated 30 ft from the ground level. Beyond that were casements of large domed structures of concrete covered with several yards of earth and sod for camouflage.

Captain Ferris Church, Battalion S-3, with F and G Companies decided to request artillery concentrations on the Fort, and pulled the companies back 400 yds for security. Fire was adjusted by 1st Lt. James Wright, then commanding F Company and Captain Jack S. Gerrie, commanding G Company by means of their SCH-300 radios. The artillery only caused the Germans to increase their own artillery and mortar fire, while enemy infantry, which had either been by-passed or had infiltrated began attacking on both flanks and the rear. Captain Church first ordered H and K companies to pull up to the forward positions, to prevent a splitting of the Battalion, but when heavy MG fire cut across the lane of advance, he ordered F and G Companies to withdraw to the beachhead. It was 880 yds back across open country, exposed to withering crossfire. It took the bulk of the Companies three hours, from 2000 to 2300 to crawl back. Many were left on the hill dead or wounded.

As the men came back, Lt Diersing, then commanding E Company and his 1st Sgt, Claude W. Hembree, gathered the men in the pitch dark and disposed them in a horseshoe formation about 200 yards in depth. (See sketch). There the men of four companies, plus thirty men from the 23 armored Infantry Bn held against artillery from Fort Verdun and Fort Driant, against mortar and MG fire from the slopes above them, against tanks that cruised the highway to their front, and against persistent infantry counterattacks. No bridge could be put in to support them and only an occasional assault boat could get across to bring supplies and evacuate the wounded. The artillery and more fired continuously on the beachhead,¹ the river, the near shore crossing site, the town of Dornot, the communication road West of Dornot and the hills North and South of the town.

The counterattacks on the beachhead force were various combinations of tank infantry teamwork. One of these came at dusk the first day. Three Mark IV tanks with "bazooka pants" - extra steel plating to guard flanks and bogies - came along the facing road from left rear and wheeled along the left flank of the beachhead, firing into the woods with 20mm and MG's. E company's lines were badly hit by this, but no fire was returned on the tanks in order to conceal positions. The tanks did not press the attack but continued along the road to the right, disappearing into the woods there. Following the tanks came infantry, estimated as a company, in a close formation, heavily armed with automatic weapons, yelling loudly "Yanks Kaput". E Company opened with rifles on the trailing Germans, but they continued to follow the tanks. This attack

¹ The word "and" after the comma is crossed out.

was probably an effort to find the exact positions of the beachhead force. Later, Mark VI's were used but would stop, giving closein artillery and MG support while enemy infantry following would close in on the forward positions with persistence and a desperate courage. The 2nd Battlalion estimated there were thirty six separate counterattacks of this sort. The enemy were losing heavily by these attacks, but each one dwindled the beachhead force.

By the morning of the 9th September it was evident that the beachhead could not be expanded, or even heald for long under this pressure. The 10th Infantry, which had been alerted to follow the 11th Infantry at Dornot, was then ordered to make a second crossing at Arnaville to take advantage of the diversion the Dornot crossing had made. Meanwhile the 2nd Battlaion was to hold on while they could. This was costly, but it proved to be a factor in the success, a narrow margin of success, which the 10th Infantry gained at Arnaville.

On the night of the 10th, after the 10th Infantry had made their beachhead objectives at Arnaville, the 2nd Battalion was evacuated by assault boats, swimming, and expedient floats. All weapons and equipment which could not be carried was thrown in the river, and vehicles on the near shore left, to be recovered later if possible, and a defensive barrage was thrown on the bridgehead area as soon as it was cleared. The evacuation was a difficult operation for men exhausted by sixty hours of heavy fighting, artillery harassing and wakefulness. Only a few assault boats would float. Bullet holes made it necessary to bail continuously. During the evacuation a German tank came up to the waters edge

and fired on the boats. One boat loaded with men, was completely destroyed. Some of the men swimming could not make the near shore. The companies arrived in the assemble area, without weapons, without equipment, many without clothes, in the following strengths: E Co - No officers and 90 men, F Company - No officers and 85 men, G Company - 2 Officers and 95 men, H Company - 5 Officers and 81 men, K Company - No officers and 50 men, I Company (fire support on near shore) 3 officers and 124 men.

II. River Crossing at Arnaville

On the 7th, September the 10th Infantry Combat Team was at Chambley, preparing to cross at Dornot and according to plan, pass on to take Metz from the South. On the 8th, the 3rd Battalion was ordered to relieve the 3d Battalion of the 11th Infantry on the high ground West of the Moselle at Arnaville.

**[PAGES 8-27 DEAL WITH
EVENTS OTHER THAN AT
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III. BRIDGEBUILDING

The 1103d Engineer Combat group, commanded by Lt. Col. George E. Walker, and under the direction of Col Tandy, XX Corps Engineer, was assigned the mission of supporting the Arnavelle crossing.

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IV. Improving the Bridgehead

By night of the 11t September a platoon of TD's and a platoon of tanks had crossed the ford and were on the beachhead, but not up to the forward positions.

**[PAGES 33-41 DEAL WITH
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Sources: Major Simpson, Bn CO, Capt John L. Lynch, Arty LnO, Capt J H Lathrop, Sgts from Bn.

Difficulty in getting story of F Co in detail since most of the Co was wiped out later in Pournoy.

**[THE 3 UNNUMBERED PAGES
OF THIS INTERVIEW DEAL
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DORNOT-RELATED PAGES ARE
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Sources: Lt Col Alden P Shipley (the Major) CO of Bn. Capt. J J MacCleskey, K Co, Capt. F L Bradley, M Co, Capt. D. W. Baugham, Arty Ln O, 46 FA Bn.

**[THE 4 UNNUMBERED PAGES
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INTERVIEW WITH Tech Sgt Hugh B SIKES 7009649 and Cpl Otto Halvorsen 37244337 Co G 2nd Bn 11 Inf re Moselle river crossing o 8 Sept.

Lt HARRY A MORRIS

Sgt. Sikes---platoon sgt 3rd platoon Co G 2nd Bn 11RCT 5 Inf Div and Cpl Halvorsen BAR man 2nd Sqd 3rd Platoon Co G 2nd Bn 11 RCT 5 Inf Div tell this account of the initial crossing of the MOSELLE river, the isolation of their battalion, engagement with the enemy and the withdrawal of the bn to west banks of the MOSELLE.

On the evening of the 7th of Sept we were told by our 1st lt plat ldr that we were to cross the river and take the high grounds E of the MOSELLE river east of And N of DORNOT. In our briefing of the possible enemy in front of us our officer said nothing much was known of the no of possible en (later developed 800 en firmly entrenched and sitting in front of forts waiting for us) in front of us but it was believed that they were pretty well set up in fortified positions that were thought to be at the top of the hi-ground which was our objective.

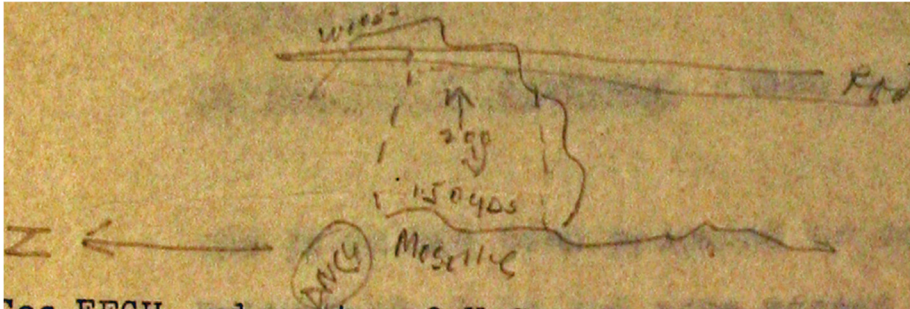
At daylight the 8th we moved out from our bivouac 2 miles NE of GORZE F co leading with the first platoon as the advance guard. G co following as the main body. Elms of H co wpns were attached to both companies. E co in rear. Arrived GORZE at 0800 staying there until 1000---why I don't know--- but moved out at 1000 F co in the lead in the same formation. At the hi-way where it meets the rrd at DOPRNOT we were fired on by smalls arms and automatic wpns and some little arty sustaining many---not over 2 or 4 wounded. F co went over the river E of DORNOT first in engr assault boats, light, but the rear elms of G co were pressing them at the river and Sgt. Sikes with his platoon became intermixed with the rear elms of F co but got his platoon across N of a little lagoon or body of water on the east side of the Moselle. Organization took one hour

At about 1300 the atk jumped off for the hi grds with F co leading on the right and G Co to the left and echeloned to the left and covering section of HMG. 2nd Plat of H Co plus a sec of HMG attached to G co with the remainder of H Co attached to E co bringing up the rear. The mission of E co was to land, organize after the atk had jumped off and follow behind F and G mopping up resistance that we would likely pass in our rush to the hi-grounds. Our advance up the hill of about 1100 yards was not met with a bit of resistance. Not a shot was fired at us. Arriving at the top of the hill we saw a pill box--this was at 1400. The Capt C.O. of F Co went up to the concrete forst when an enemy patrol of about 10 inf came out. Capt fired his automatic at them and we saw F co open fire but the patrol shot the capt killing him with their machine pistols. En route up the hill I saw several concrete dug outs, pill-boxes, steel bars sunk in concrete on the hiway directly across the river. We withdrew about 600 yards. Our capt said that he had rec'd radio orders to do so as out long toms were going to shell the fortifications. We had a 536 SCR and a 300 SCR but were using the 300 SCR when across the river. We withdrew 600 yds and dug in. Our arty opened fire and many of its shells hit in F Co area killing 3 and wounding 2. After the arty finished we got up to advance again when we heard automatic wpns being fired in our rear. Thought it was E Co coming after us mopping up. The bullets began landing amongst us and we discovered that the enemy had gotten between us and the river cutting us off. They were occupying z trench at the base of the hill about 250 yds to our rear. We had attacked on a 200 yard front. Received orders from bn to get back to the river as Co E had organized a brhd there. En was shooting MG fire at us using two MGs together. One shooting tracer high and the other set up right by it shooting grazing fire but not using tracer. Purpose was for men to and avoid the grazing fire but Sgt. Sikes who had had experience with this german method of using MGs before warned men in his platoon and so avoided the grazing fire. We organized to atk down hill in line of skirmishers but the hill was plotted with vineyards and couldn't do this so we went to the right coming down hill in a single column in a sort of draw that had concealment but there was about 300 yards clear space between the shrubs and trees and the base of the hill. The enemy strung out along the base in a concrete trench with a house set up at one end in which they had the two MGs. (house was to our left as came down)

PAGE TWO

One mortar and about a platoon of Infantrymen. A small amount but the only gap they had to close was one about 150 yards wide and they could do it with that. We organized our platoons to move across the open space in a single column of squads with about 10 yards between each man. It was getting very dark by then and visibility was poor. Our first man was about 3/4 of the way across with others following when the MGs in pairs again opened fire. Casualties were not as heavy as would be expected although when one would drop we had orders not to stop but to run on, the men had orders if they were hit to crawl the rest of the way or if they couldn't then to lie still and the medics would get them. We made it back to the brhd to Co E who built up a base of fire on the house and the en helping our withdrawal. Medics went out for the wounded but the en would either shoot them down or as they did then and afterwards during and thro out our entire stay there would let medic get up to the wounded and then shoot the medic and the wounded man. This occurred even in daylight hours on ensuing days.

The brhd was like this:



Had Cos EFGH and parts of K Co of the 10th there plus two platoons of the 23rd Arm'd Inf of the 7t Arm'd Division. The heaviest wpn we had was 3 bazookas amongst the whole group. We had no mines or explosives. We were formed in a square defense of 150 yds wide and two hundred yards long with an all around defense built up.

Ammo was the big problem and we had to husband it altho some was gotten over to us at night. Co G got 2 rations a day altho the rest of the cos only got one a day. Never did receive any water and we ran out of Halyzone pills after the first night. We drank the river water constantly. Everyman dug himself at least a slit trench and those who slit trenches only dug a deeper holde at the rear of the slit trench which we called a mole hole. That is it was a tunnel down into the earth about 6 feet with a slit trench entrance. Others dug fox holes. Most had mole holes. We received heavy arty fire the first night with a ctr-atk on our positions almost hourly which consisted almost entirely of Infantry with burp guns and rifles. They would line up or organize across the road and we could hear them giving orders which always ended with a "Heil Hitler" and then they would come charging us across the road. They would always be very close bunched up tho and our BARs had a field day with them killing over 20 to 1 in every charge although on their first atk we were not so well prepared and they wiped out almost two squads of the 2nd platoon of Co G. After that when we dug in we lost very little altho some were wounded but we killed a lot of the en which were almost all SS troops.

The tks at night would run up and down the hi-way in front of us and fire at the brhd to the south. We were unable to do anything about it. We fire the bazookas at them but they all had aprons on them and the bazooka projectiles just bounce off them. We had no mines to lay on the road altho we requested them repeatedly.

We stayed in this position for 2½ nights and three days getting the wounded out at night. We at one time got as low as 2 medics in the whole outfit. The first night was the worst. Only two medics and no med officer could get across to us because of the heavy arty fire from tks and the forst which commanded the river and prohibited its use until the following night.

We were told to wait and hold on and that relief would come. When no relief came our bn officers worked out a plan of withdrawal to the west side. Retreat by swimming across. Starting with the first platoon of arm'd Inf they would swim across. All who could swim were to go and when they got across they were to bring boats back for those who couldn't. Retreat was done at night and radios clothing equipment and arms were thrown into the water. Platoon at a time took to the water while the others fired on en and built up a volume of fire to cover the splashing. Some of the men blew up ruber condoms and used them for water wings. Some who didn't take off their clothes were drowned in the swift current. River wasn't very deep not over 6 to7 feet but very swift and panic²

² The bottom of the page is gone.

3d Bn 11th Inf

Sgt. Ludder³

Lt Col. W. H. Birdsong (then Major) CO of Bn

The 3d Bn had been prepared to cross onto the Dornot Bridgehead. K Co had gone across on the 9th and suffered heavily on the crossing. The rest of the Bn was in positions vic Dornot waiting to go across. At 1200, 10th, Major Birdsong was called to the Regt. Cp. There he was told that his Bn would be used to support the right flank of the Arnaville Bridgehead.

**[THE 6 UNNUMBERED PAGES
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DORNOT-RELATED PAGES ARE
COMPLETED.]**

³ For reference, this is page 54 in the PDF file of 119 pages.

Sources: 1st Lt. R W Butney, CO of Co, was leader of 1st Plat. Platoon and Sq Sgts. also Lt Taylor; Lt Schilla; Lt Dutko; T/5 Jones.

Co strength at beginning of crossing was 80 men. Strength depleted in Dornot Crossing. At time of Crossing were under 1st Bn, Lt. Col. Leadbetter. A, L, and K Co's crossed on the morning of the 16th.

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⁴ For reference, this is page 60 in the PDF file of 119 pages.

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Order of Events.

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Interview With Engineer Officers on Bredgehead Operations

The 1103d Engineer Combat Group was assigned the mission of supporting the 5th Infantry Division during the advance from VERDUN toward METZ. The Group consisted of:

150th Engineer C Bn, commanded by MAJOR BRUCE REAGAN
160th Engineer C Bn, commanded by MAJOR THOMAS L. HOWARD
204th Engineer C Bn, commanded by MAJOR WALTER J. PETERS
551st Engineer Hv Pon Bn, commanded by LT COL MARSH P. STOCKTON
537th Engineer L Pon Co, commanded by CAPT OSCAR W. MARASKA
623rd Engineer L E Co, commanded by CAPT PAUL C. KOERNER
989th Engineer Tdwy Br Co commanded by CAPT ARNOLD MAEKER

The 5th Division began its advance in two columns and elements of the 1103d Engineers were placed within each of these march columns. On the North route, Co "A" 160th Engineer C Bn plus an assault boat section of the 537th Engr L Pon Co was under the command of CAPT ARCHIE MAYES, 160th Engineers. In the South column, a larger task force consisting initially of Companies "B" and "C", 160th Engineers, 1 platoon 989th Engr Tdwy Br Co, and one assault boat platoon section 537th Engr L Pon Co, all under the command of MAJOR EDWIN R. SLEAR, 1103d Engr C Gp. supported the advance of the 11th Combat Team, 5th Division.

The plan of operations of the 11 C T was to move by motors to an assembly area vicinity BUXIERES (U6852) then move on foot in two columns to seize high ground vicinity NOVEANT and DORNOT and force a crossing over MOSELLE River between DORNOT and CORNY. Engineers were to be employed as follows: Co "C" 7th Engr Bn with one platoon attached to each Infantry Bn was to make the assault crossing using the assault boats of the 537th Engr L Pon Co. One platoon Co "C" 160th Engr C Bn assisted Light Equipage personnel of the 537th Engr L Pon Co was to construct and operate Infantry Support Rafts, two with each Bn.

⁵ For reference, this is page 72 in the PDF file of 119 pages. There is also a handwritten left margin note: "Check on persons interviewed" It is over initials that might be "HM".

Light Equipage personnel of 537th Engr L Pon Co was to construct and operate Infantry Support Rafts, two with each Bn.

In conformance with this plan the platoon of Co "C" 160 Engr C Bn and the detachment of the 537 Engr L Pon Co moved to the bivouac area of Co "C" 7th Engr BN vicinity MARCHEVILLE (U5056) closing at 070430B.

The operation commenced at 070800B. By 071630B the attack had progressed sufficiently so that Co "B" 160th Engr C Bn and platoon 989th Engr Tdwy Br Co were moved to (U660508) vicinity CHAMBLEY closing in that area 071530B.

During afternoon 7 Sept plans were changed which called for construction of a bridge vicinity DORNOT and another at CORNY. For this purpose Co "A" 551st Engr Hv Pon Bn and Co "C" 150th Engr C Bn were ordered to vicinity CHAMBLEY. These units closed in the designated areas at 080200B and 071900B respectively.

One platoon Co "C" 150th Engr C Bn was committed at 080130B to clear road block vicinity GORZE. Second platoon this company was given the mission at 081030B of sweeping the road from ST CATHERINES FARM near GORZE toward DORNOT as far forward as possible. Upon completion of these tasks Company was ordered to assemble in bivouac vicinity DORNOT.

Assault crossing was scheduled to start at daylight 8 Sept, but was delayed due to presence of 7th Armored troops on crossing site. Crossing was made by 7th Engr Bn (Co "C").

Enemy resistance was such that Infantry Support Rafts could not be used. Personnel designated for this job remained in assembly area at (U755520).

During the morning of 8 Sept Co "B" 160th Engr C Bn was moved to an assembly area (U745525). Platoon 989 moved to (U720528).

During night of 8-9 Sept Co "C" 150 Engr C Bn relieved Co "C" 7th Engr C Bn on operation of assault boats. Initial bridgehead was reinforced and supply and evacuation of wounded accomplished during darkness. Enemy resistance increased steadily during this period and original bridgehead was considerable reduced in area. During morning Sept 9 intense Artillery, mortar and small arms fire kept personnel at crossing site pinned to the ground.

At 091200B orders were received detaching 150th Engr C Bn from XX Corps. Relief of Co "C" of that organization was effected by Co "C" 204t Engr C Bn at 091400B. During night 9-10 Sept only evacuation and supply of bridgehead was accomplished.

By morning of 10 Sept bridgehead had been reduced to an area 150 yards deep by 100 yards wide. Operations during daylight hours ceased except for evacuation of wounded. Town of DORNOT and crossing site were under continual fire from Artillery and mortars. It was decided to evacuate the bridgehead night of 10-11 Sept. Plan of operation as follows: Withdrawal to commence sometime after dark. Exact time to be determined by Commanding

Officer 3d Bn 11 Infantry in DORNOT. Ropes strung across river to be used to evacuate unwounded personnel. Rubber reconnaissance boats to be used for the evacuation of wounded only, because of intense small arms fire. Necessary rope for this purpose to be carried by hand to site during afternoon. Rubber reconnaissance boats to be inflated and carried from bivouac area of Co "C" 204 Engr C Bn at (U745525) to edge of woods at (U763516) during daylight and then carried by hand to site under cover of darkness. A floating line was to be assembled consisting of six rubber reinforcing inserts (sausages) connect end to end with rope. This was to be brought down with the boats and strung across the river to serve as an additional means of evacuating the unwounded. Co "C" 204th Engr C Bn was committed as follows: One platoon with one platoon of Infantry to work at crossing site. Remainder of Company to assemble and transport required equipment to site.

Preparations were completed by dark 10 Sept. The withdrawal started at 2110B. This proved to be too early. Equipment being carried from edge of woods to crossing site (a distance of about ½ mile) did not reach site until 2200B due to shelling of road and town. By this time a large number of troops had crossed river by means of one rope in place and by swimming.

By 2230B equipment was in place and evacuation of wounded had begun using rubber boats. The floating line proved to be very satisfactory and greatly facilitated the crossing of unwounded men. Evacuation was completed by 110030B.

EMPLOYMENT OF A SMOKE GENERATOR COMPANY IN AN
ASSULT CROSSING OF THE MOSELLE RIVER. . . .

by
Lt. Col. L. B. Cottingham⁶

When plans were being made for the crossing of the Moselle River by the 5th Division the need for smoke cover of the bridge was foreseen.

Initially it was a job for a 4.2 Mortar Bn. but the only smoke units that could be obtained was a Smoke Generator Company, the 84th Chemical (SG). This Company was attached to the Division but it arrived too late to be used in the first crossing by the 11th CT. The crossing was made by the 11th CT but did not hold nor was a bridge constructed at the site.

**[THESE 2 NUMBERED PAGES
DEAL WITH EVENTS OTHER
THAN AT DORNOT AND ARE
NOT TRANSCRIBED UNTIL ALL
DORNOT-RELATED PAGES ARE
COMPLETED.]**

⁶ For reference, this is page 76 in the PDF file of 119 pages.

**[THESE 6 NUMBERED PAGES
DEAL WITH EVENTS OTHER
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COMPLETED.]**

⁷ For reference, this is page 78 in the PDF file of 119 pages.

Notes:

*Sgt. Ludder*⁸

The Crossing of the Moselle River and the Defense of the Bridgehead by the 10th Infantry Regiment.

On September 8th, the 10th Infantry Regiment was in the vicinity of Chambley resting for the first time since they had landed in France. Their vehicles had been without gas for four days, but the Infantrymen were glad to have the chance to rest. The Regimental Commander, Col, Bell, however was concerned about the breathing spell that German's were being given to man and supply the ancient defences of Metz. Reports were coming to him of the heavy resistance being met by the other units in action on the line.

The 11th Infantry had made a crossing of the Moselle at *DORNOT* with one battalion and one company. CCB had sent two companies across 500yds to the North of *DORNOT*. But this bridge-head was being thrown back. The crossing was in the face of two forts built in 1870, now manned by about 1,500 of the best enemy troops with artillery *OF LARGE CALIBRE*. The 11th Infantry was being thrown back, their losses already about 300 men.⁹

**[THESE 14 NUMBERED PAGES
(plus one duplicate in
the PDF) DEAL WITH EVENTS
OTHER THAN AT DORNOT AND
ARE NOT TRANSCRIBED UNTIL
ALL DORNOT-RELATED PAGES
ARE COMPLETED.]**

⁸ For reference, this is page 84 in the PDF of the 119 pages.

⁹ This is clearly an after-the-fact account of the Dornot bridgehead, which he originally gave erroneously as being at Novient. His flawed understanding of the situation at Dornot reveals how little accurate knowledge there was of events not that far away.

CROSSING OF THE MOSELLE

Ny the 2d Bn of the 11th Inf
plus "K" Company¹¹

The date was 7 September 1944 and the place was the small town of DORNOT approximately five miles south of METZ on the MOSELLE river. The unit performing the deed was the 11th Infantry Regiment, supported by its usual combat team supplement of Company C of 818 TD Bn, Co C of the 735th Tank Bn, Collecting Co C of the 5th Medical Battalion, the 19th Field Artillery Bn and Co C of the 7th Engineer Bn. As action developed, the 5th Division Artillery and the 204th Artillery Group, which included eight-inch howitzers and later, 240mm. guns, along with the 1103 Combat Engineer Group and the 168th Medical Bn and 435th Collecting Company litter squads entered the pictured. All that, however, was superimposed upon the deeds of the men and officers of the 2d Bn, 11th Infantry, K Co and the 3d Bn Medical Section, 11th Infantry, in establishing a bridgehead across the MOSELLE river; -- a bridgehead which, although it had to be evacuated due to the impossibility of reinforcing it and bridging it, became the easternmost point of advance for the allied armies rolling toward Germany, an area where upwards of a thousand Naze Storm Troopers and fanatic Adolph Hitler Brigade soldiers were killed, and a basis for a second bridgehead which was established three thousand (3,000) yards further south on the Moselle by the 10th Infantry, supplemented by an 11th Infantry Battalion composed of B, C and L Rifle Companies governed by 3d Bn Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the 1st Bn Medical Section.

Rain and mud hampered slightly the advance of the 1st and 3rd Bns on the 7 September but they reached their objective of the high ground on the west bank of the Moselle, just north and just south of DORNOT, about 22 hours. The 2d Bn, with its attachments, went into assembly area of BUXIERES. Lt Col Kelly B. Lemmon, the 2d Bn Commander, his S-3, Capt Ferris Church, S-2 Capt Douglas Hargrave, and company commanders 1st Lt Wilbur Wood, Hq Co, 1st Lt Jack Robert Spencer, E Co, 1st Lt Nathan Drake, F Co, and Capt Jack S. Gerrie, G Co, and Capt Robert Spencer, H Co, gathered at the regimental CP (a farmhouse at Buixieres) to study maps of the area around DORNOT on both sides of the river. A site was picked and the decision made to force a crossing of the Moselle before daylight on 8 Sep. Up to this time, no artillery fire of any appreciable intensity had been received at the river crossing site. It was known, however, that the 80th Div, further south at Pnt-a-Masson¹², had had two companies on the east bank of the Moselle which had to be withdrawn after being severely mauled by artillery and mortar fire. It was also known that the 7th Armored Div had put across part of a company of the 23d Armored Inf and had to evacuate due to mortar and artillery fire.¹³ The plan, to the knowledge of the 2d Bn and the 11th Inf regtl comdr and his staff, was for the 2d Bn to force a crossing of the Moselle at Dornot while the 7th Armored was to cross a bn of armored inf at a site 1,000 yards north.

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¹⁰ For reference, this is page 99 in the PDF of the 119 pages.

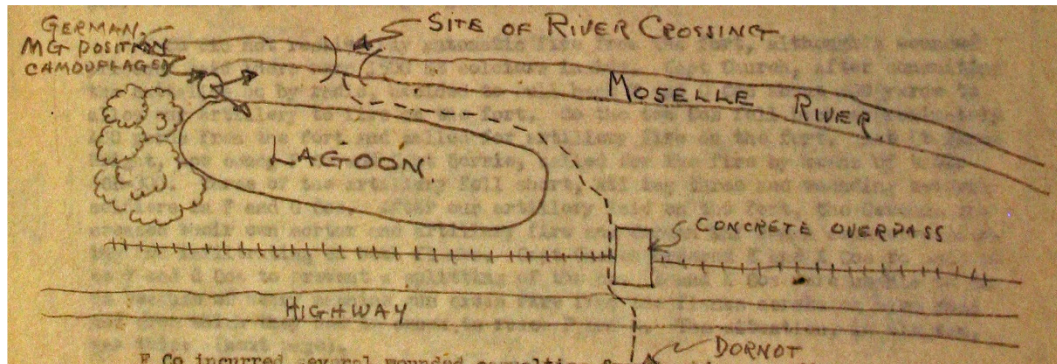
¹¹ Handwritten note at top left reads "Original, with my comments, returned to Sgt Ludder for reworking" and is initialed what may be "HM". This is clearly an after-the-fact account that is also after the later Arnville crossing.

¹² Pont-a-Mousson

¹³ This was erroneous intelligence. 23AIB had attempted a crossing but did not succeed.

The 2d Bn marched from its assembly, through the town of GORCE¹⁴, (which E Co and the 2d plat of AT Co had previously cleared of an enemy strongpoint) and arrived at Dornot at 0430 hours to find the town full of the 7th Armored vehicles and personnel. A colonel from XX Corps delivered an order to the 7th Armored that they were to cross before the 11th at the 2d Bn site, so the 2d Bn halted, brought up boats to a place 250 yards from the river edge at 0610 hours on 8 Sep and waited for the armored inf to cross.¹⁵ The armored inf had one assault boat in the water but did not cross due to small arms fire. Lt Col Lemmon informed Col Yuill of the situation as of 0630 hours and Col Yuill promptly informed 5th Div Hq. Meantime the 2d Bn could not get any closer due to the congestion caused by 7th Armored vehicles and personnel. At 0930 the div comdr telephoned Col Yuill that the 7th had been ordered to clear the area and move to the north and cross while the 2d Bn crossed at Dornot. The armor then did clear the area somewhat but many vehicles, with their bright cerise panels were left parked out in the open on the road leading uphill from Dornot which was under perfect enemy observation. All those vehicles (armored cars) were smashed by enemy fire later and the mines and ammunition on them also exploded to the great danger of personnel in the area.

The 2d Bn brought down assault boats closer to the water's edge and planned to cross at 1045. When the hour arrived, however enemy mortar and artillery fire was so intense that further artillery preparations were called for. Artillery did fire a good concentration with the 19th FA, 284th FA and 21st FA firing and at 1115 F Co, with 1st Lt Nathan F Drake in the lead boat, jumped off. Five assault boats were used in the river at once, that being the number which could be most expediently handled. The river, at the crossing site was 50 yards wide. Diagram below shows relativity of road, railroad, lagoon and river:



F Co incurred several wounded casualties from machine gun fire in crossing. G Co immediately following F Co suffered one killed and four wounded in crossing, from machine gun fire. All of G Co was across by 1320 hours. H Co had a sec of heavy machine guns and a sec of 81mm mortars with both F and G Cos. E Co crossed later in the afternoon. E Co crossed at about 1700 hours.¹⁶ All crossings were made under mortar fire and bursts of machine gun fire. Direct fire fr 88mm guns on Tiger tanks was also periodically laid on the crossing and the surrounding area. Co C of the 7th Engr controlled the assault boats on the 8th of Sep, and suffered many casualties.

¹⁴ Gorze

¹⁵ Gen. Patton had the erroneous intelligence that 23AIB had crossed, and he ordered that the (non-existent) bridgehead not be withdrawn. When he learned that there was no bridgehead, he assumed there had been one and that his order had not been followed. He ordered the 7AD CCB commander relieved and 23 AIB to make the crossing. It was all based on faulty intelligence. 23 AIB had no capability of forcing a successful crossing and were eventually attached to 11th Infantry Regiment for the crossing.

¹⁶ Typed "1800" is crossed out and replaced with handwritten "1700".

Once across, F and G Cos, with G Co echeloned to the left rear of F, advanced rapidly directly east and directly uphill toward the forts located at 798512 and 799506, map NW Europe, 1/1000,000.¹⁷ German inf was met and pushed back into the fort by F Co as it advanced. Ten Germans were killed as F Co advanced. None of F Co was killed in the advance until they reached the fort. In the woods just short of the fort, Lt Drake bent over a wounded German to ask him a question. As Lt Drake straightened back and raised his head he shot in the forehead by one of three German snipers located just ten yards away. He died instantly. Avenging American fire sprayed the position of the three German riflemen thoroughly.

The forts were about 2500 yards east of the river, located on the military crest of the high ground, with consequent commanding observation of all activity on the west bank of the Moselle and the river crossing site. They had been built around 1870 and improved in 1939 and again prepared for defense by the Germans in the few weeks of August, 1944, before the Allied advance. (This information obtained from prisoners and from civilians who worked in the forts and from a French colonel named Dumage whom the Div MII section can further identify). As described by 1st Sgt Willard Cheek and S Sgt Joseph Locke and other soldiers of F Co who arrived at the fort about 1600 hours on 8 Sep, the fort was well nigh impregnable. F Co had cut its way through five separate barbed wire, double apron fences approaching the fort only to come up against an iron barred fence studded with curved iron hooks that prevented scaling. On the other side of the iron fence a dry moat or road which dropped an estimated 30 feet fr the ground level surrounded the fort which was a huge domed structure of concrete covered by several yards of earth on the top of which grass formed a good camouflage against observation.

F Co did not receive any automatic fire from the fort, although a wounded prisoner said there were 1500 SS soldiers inside. Capt Church, after consulting the battalion by radio, decided to pull back F and G Cos about 400 yards to allow our artillery to fire on the fort. So the two Cos fell back approximately 400 yards from the fort and called for artillery fire on the fort. 1st Lt James Wright, now comdg F Co and Capt Gerrie, called for the fire by means of their SCR-300. Three of the artillery fell short, killing and wounding several soldiers in F and G Cos. After our artillery laid on the fort, the Germans increased their own mortar and artillery fire and German inf began counter-attacking and infiltrating on both flanks. Capt Church ordered E and K Cos to pull up to F and G Cos to prevent a splitting of the bn. E and K Cos were unable to do so because of heavy machine gun cross fire from the flanks across an open road and area which had to cross to reach F and G. The situation, in diagram, was this: (next page).

¹⁷ The entry as "1000,000" is as in the original.