



HEADQUARTERS 206 ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APO 403, U. S. ARMY

5 Jan 45

SUBJECT: After Action Report for December 1944.

TO : Commanding General, XX Corps, APO 340, U. S. Army
Attn: Historical Officer

On 301200 Nov 44¹, the 206th Engineer Combat Battalion was relieved from support of the 10th Armored Division and attachment to the 1139th Engineer Combat Group, and attached to the 95th Infantry Division for an assault crossing on the Saar River at Lisdorf. The Battalion, then at Apach, Germany proceeded to Bouzonville, France to prepare for the crossing.

On 1 Dec 44, a forward Command Post was established at Dalem, with Companies A, B, and C moving to that location and Headquarters & Service Company and a Headquarters detachment remaining at Bouzonville. Preparations continued during the day, including the gathering of the necessary equipment and reconnaissance, such preparation continuing throughout the 2 & 3 Dec 44. During this period, the companies were following the infantry advance, filling anti-tank ditches, sweeping for mines, and repairing roads on the Main Supply Route (MSR).

On 3 Dec 44, the forward Command Post was advanced to Altforweiler, at which time we came under enemy artillery fire, which intermittently fell in the town. No personnel or equipment losses were sustained at this time, however.

On 042000A Dec 44², the Command Post was moved forward to Lisdorf, all units moving in under cover of darkness, taking positions and making final preparations for the forthcoming assault, which was scheduled for 050600 Dec 44. Previous reconnaissance of the assault sites along the river having been made, the boats were laid out in the vicinity of the river, from which points they would be carried to the assault sites by the infantry. In reconnoitering his site, and preparing the area over which he would have to carry his boats, Capt. Patterson, Company C, rounded up approximately 30 head of cattle and horses in Lisdorf and drove them across the area to clear the area of any S-mines.

The first wave jumped off at the scheduled hour, 0600, on 5 Dec 44, Company B ferrying the 3rd Battalion of the 378th Infantry Regiment on the left flank and Company C ferrying the 1st Battalion of the 378th Infantry Regiment on the right flank. Company A had one platoon standing by for reserve boat crews, but they were not used. The initial

¹ 1200 hrs, 30 Nov 44

² 2000 hrs, 04 Dec 44, east of the Greenwich Meridian.



wave met only sporadic rifle fire, however at 0624, the enemy fired a red flare into the air, apparently a pre-arranged signal, giving the alarm, and immediately, fire from weapons of all types and calibers was brought to bear on the town and the river. Large caliber artillery was poured into the town of Lisdorf, antiaircraft guns were leveled and fired across the river, as well as machine gun and small arms fire.

One (1) platoon, Company A, was scheduled to build an infantry support bridge immediately after the assault waves were crossed, however, enemy fire was so intense, it was impossible to start the construction. However, a footbridge was constructed, in protection of the buildings of the town, in sections, and the sections hand-carried to the river and put in place. As this bridge site was in defilade, protection was provided from direct fire while putting the bridge in place. Construction of the bridge commenced about 0600 and the sections completed ready for placement by 0700 hrs. By 0746, the bridge had been built across the river, and infantry troops were moving across it.

As of 050800 Dec 44, this Battalion was relieved from attachment to 95th Infantry Division and attached to 1139th Engineer Combat Group with the information that the Battalion was to cross the 90th Infantry Division across the Saar River north of the 95th Division sector. We were relieved at Lisdorf by the 204th Engineer Combat Battalion, and shortly after 0800 began to move our troops back to Altforweiler by infiltration to get what rest they could prior to moving to support the 90th Infantry Division. The temporary Command Post at Lisdorf was closed at 1000, and established in Altforweiler at 1015.

Col. Pirrung, Battalion Commander, had left Lisdorf at approximately 0100, after receipt of a message of reverting to control of the 1139th Engineer Combat Group, to go to Group Headquarters, and proceed on to 90th Infantry Division Headquarters, to get information on the 90th Infantry Division crossing and make necessary plans. In the early afternoon, he sent a message to Maj. Wing, Executive Officer, to send a quartering party to Wallerfangen with the Adjutant, and to send the S-2, S-3, Commanding Officers of Companies B and C, and an additional Officer from each company, and Capt. Greer to Gunsigen immediately to meet the Commanding Officer at Headquarters of the 358th Infantry Regiment. At 1700, the Adjutant returned, and at 1730 hrs, we cleared Altforweiler and proceeded by motor march to Wallerfangen, arriving at 1900 hrs and establishing a Command Post in the basement of a school building.

By the time the troops arrived, the Commanding Officer (Battalion Commander) and Company Commanders had their plans formed for the operation, the assault sites selected, and had performed a daylight recon over the area in which they were to operate. Capt Greer, with the two additional Company Officers the Commanding Officer (Battalion Commander) had called for earlier in the day, had been dispatched, with trucks, to pick up the required number of assault boats from the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion at Niedeldorf.



The plan of action prescribed that Company B was to ferry the 3rd Battalion of the 358th Infantry Regiment, and Company C the 1st Battalion, at the selected sites just north of Wallerfangen; Company B on the left flank; Company C on the right flank; H-Hour to be at 060415 Dec 44. This required the men of this Battalion to effect a second assault crossing of the Saar River, involving two different infantry divisions, at two different locations, in less than 24 hrs. A 90-minute artillery barrage by XX Corps Artillery was scheduled for 2130 hrs to cover the sound of placing the boats in position. Rendezvous with the infantry was set for 0330 hrs at previously selected sites some distance from where the boats were placed, so that the infantry troops could be formed into boatloads, with the engineer crews and engineer guide, without arousing the attention of the enemy. The boats were to be concealed in the woods bordering the road, which ran along the riverbank in the selected area. The road was to be utilized in placing the boats, by idling along the road as the boats were unloaded and spaced, the noise of the operation being covered by the pre-arranged artillery barrage. The infantry troops were to be guided down to the boats, together with their engineer crews, and at 0410 hrs, pick up the boats, head for the river, launch the boats and go across without further delay or signal.

By 1955 hrs, however, no word had been received as to the location of the boats, so the Commanding Officer called the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion and talked to Capt Greer, being informed that one of the trucks hauling the equipment had a flat tire and was delaying the getting of the boats on their way. It was then decided to send the other trucks, hauling Company C boats, on ahead, and Company B boats to follow as soon as possible. Because of the delay, the artillery barrage, scheduled for 2130, was postponed till 2345.

By 2200, Company C boats arrived. They then proceeded up the road along the river to the place where the boats were to be layed out. However, the Company ran into a roadblock - Belgian gate type - halting its progress, as it was impossible to go around it. This road had previously been swept for mines, and the gates had not been closed at that time, so it was an unexpected obstacle and delay. There were a number of German civilians living in caves along the river and it is believed one of them was responsible for closing the gate. Attempts were made to remove the obstacle as noiselessly as possible, with a hacksaw and pinch bar, however these attempts were futile and it was found necessary to use the more expeditious, but noisy, means of blowing it open with TNT. By 060155, this had been done, and the trucks continued only to run into another similar type obstacle further along the road. This was immediately blown at 060219, and, as by that time, the Company C boat line had been staked out, and boat crews standing by, it was apparent that Company C would be ready and waiting for H-hour.

In the meantime, the Company B boats had gotten underway and were proceeding along a north route (Company C had used a south route in bringing in their boats) to bring them into the north site. At 052345 hrs, 10 minutes after Company C ran into their obstacle, Lt. Rhodes, bringing in the Company B boats, reported in by telephone that the lead truck of his two (2) trucks, had struck a mine and was disabled. It being a narrow



road, the disabled truck completely blocked the road so that the rear truck was not able to go around and continue with its load, nor could it turn around. These two trucks, and one trailer hitched to the lead truck, were hauling a total of 24 boats, the boats necessary for Company B to complete its mission. Lt Rhein, Motor Officer, was immediately dispatched with a wrecker and crew to turn around the good truck, hitch the trailer, and try to get it to the river by another route. This would provide 16 boats at least for the operation.

In the meantime it was determined to turn over to Company B the 14 reserve boats carried on a BSO trailer, and it was established that Company C also had 8 spare boats in their load, which were turned over to Company B, the 22 boats being enough for the operation. These boats reached Company B and were in place, ready for the operation, prior to H-hour. The boats, which had been delayed, did not arrive in time and when they did get in, were taken directly to the Battalion Command Post area as reserves.

Company C took the 1st Battalion of the 358th Infantry Regiment over in three (3) waves, jumping off at H-hour with the first wave. By 0447 hrs, they had completed the assault, and had started to withdraw with the exception of three (3) crews, which remained for evacuation purposes. They had met little opposition and experienced no difficulty.

Company B, however, did not get under way at H-hour due to the inability of the engineer guides and the infantry to find each other. The infantry did not show up at the rendezvous point at the appointed time, and after searching for some time, were finally located by the Company B Commander and 1st Sgt, who with one of the Company B Platoon Commanders, immediately formed them into three (3) groups and guided them to the site where the boats were layed out. By 0552, the infantry had been organized at the boat sites, and the first wave taken across shortly thereafter, and the Infantry Battalion completely crossed by 0620 hrs. More opposition in the form of machine gun fire was encountered in this sector.

Soon after the 3rd Battalion of the 358th Infantry Regiment crossed, the 2nd Battalion (reserve) began arriving for crossing, and Company C crews were sent down stream to the Company B sector to cross the reserve battalion.

The Dilligen bridgehead had been successfully established and by 0925, the infantry had reached their first phase line.

During the day of 6 Dec 44, preparations were under way to build an M-2 treadway bridge and to start a ferry service for supply and evacuation. However, at 1930 hrs, the Battalion was informed to suspend any work on the bridge, as it would be constructed by the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion. Preparations for ferries continued however, getting boats, motors, and operators from other engineer units. Beginning at 1500 hrs, one squad of Company C began evacuating wounded by boat. During the night



of 6 & 7 Dec 44, ferrying of supplies and evacuation of wounded, was carried on with 17 storm boats powered by 22-hp motors, involving one (1) platoon of Company C. All required ferrying was completed by 070700 Dec 44. It was necessary to suspend operations along the river during daylight because of the complete observation the enemy had of the Saar River, which was not completely obscured by the smoke. As it was, after the crossing was made, enemy artillery and mortar fire was directed along the riverbank, and when any movement was observed, heavy concentrations of fire were directed at that point.

During the day of 7 Dec 44, preparations were made to construct and operate an infantry support raft the following night for the purpose of ferrying a minimum of three (3) jeeps and three (3) anti-tank guns across. This operation was not accomplished this night however, as what was thought to be an anti-tank ditch was found on the other side of the river. Ferrying of supplies with storm boats proceeded.

Further recon of the far shore showed the ditch was not an anti-tank ditch, and did not cross the road leading from the far side of the old civilian ferry site, which was to be used to move the vehicles inland.

Plans to operate two (2) infantry support rafts continued in preparation and further recon made during the night of 7 & 8 Dec and 8 Dec., two (2) platoons from Company A to build and operate them. By 082000 Dec 44, the first ferry was ready for operation and at 090500, the second ferry was ready, and the ferrying of jeeps, anti-tank guns, and tank destroyers began. Smoke protection made it possible for these ops to carry on during the day without being pinpointed by artillery, though enemy artillery constantly was thrown along the riverbank, and frequently became so intense, it was necessary to suspend operations. Also, the frequent and heavy shelling continuously punctured the floats, so that it was necessary to stop for repairs.

In addition to the ferrying operations, during 8 Dec 44, one (1) platoon of Company C prepared for the demolition of abutments of a destroyed concrete bridge across the river in anticipation of walking tanks across the debris. Also, Company B, with one (1) platoon of Company C attached crossed the 359th Infantry Regiment on the night of 8 Dec 44 without opposition.



Soldiers of the 161st Chemical Smoke Generating Company, U.S. Third Army, move a barrel of oil in preparation to refilling an M-2 smoke generator, which spews forth a heavy cloud of white smoke. These men are engaged in laying a smoke screen to cover ferrying operations across the Saar River near Wallerfangen, Germany. December 11, 1944. Rothenberger. 111-SC-197552. (afri031.jpg)



The ferrying operations, with infantry support rafts and storm boats continued thru-out the period of establishing the Dilligen bridgehead day and night, under artillery, mortar and machine gun fire, except for those periods when artillery concentrations were so intense, it was necessary to temporarily suspend activities. Many vehicles, including tanks and tank destroyers were moved across the Saar River in this manner, in addition to regular supply and evacuation.

On 12 Dec 44, logs were cut from the wooded area bordering the river, and the construction of two (2) corduroy roads commenced. These roads ran from the far shore of the Saar River, where rafts unloaded, to the road running inland from an old civilian ferry site, to enable the vehicles ferried to transverse the mud to the road. A previously constructed plank road would not stand the moving of numerous and heavy vehicles. The roads were about 500 yds long, and construction and maintenance of the roads continued daily.

Due to the enemy counter-attack in the First U.S. Army sector, we were put on a two-hour alert to withdraw from Wallerfangen on 20 Dec 44; however, no movement was made until 21 Dec 44. On 21 Dec 44 we moved from Wallerfangen by infiltration and established Command Post at Bouzonville (wQ1378, Nord D'Guerre), with the exception of rear elements consisting of Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, S-3 Section, and operating platoons, which remained to complete the withdrawal of the infantry. Most of the tanks, tank destroyers and vehicles had been brought back across the Saar River during 21 Dec 44; however, it was not until 220930 Dec 44 that the last of them were ferried back across. The foot troops were evacuated back across the river between 0400-0600, 22 Dec 44. The ferrying operations were terminated as of 1000, 22 Dec 44 and rear elements closed in Bouzonville at 1130, 22 Dec 44.

On 22 Dec 44, this Battalion was relieved of support to the 90th Infantry Division and placed in support of the 95th Infantry Division and assigned the task of constructing a series of barrier zones in the 95th Division sector. Immediate recon of the areas was commenced and actual construction of obstacles commenced on 28 Dec 44 in areas designated as Bee Zone, Chowzone, and Nied River Zone. Obstacles consisted of minefields, abates, craters, and charges placed on the bridge ready for demolition. Construction of obstacles was continuing at the end of December.

In addition, a pile bridge was constructed at Eblange and guarding of bridges at Bouzonville and Bettange was a continuous function. Also, constant recon of roads in our assigned area for enemy demolition was performed as well as blowing of bombs and enemy demolition found in the area.

Out of our experience with the 90th and 95th Infantry Divisions in the crossings of the Saar River, it was determined that there were insufficient motor-boat operators, and many of those who were available were not sufficiently trained or experienced in



operating under combat conditions where continuous day and night ferrying was necessary. Consequently, beginning 26 Dec 44, two (2) men from each company were detailed to attend motor-boat schools for three (3) days duration conducted by the 180th Engineer Battalion (Heavy Ponton), the 135th Engineer Combat Battalion, and the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion - a different group every three (3) days.

Also out of our experience with corduroy road in the 90th Infantry Division operation, it was determined that additional training should be had in the construction of corduroy roads, this school being conducted by one platoon of Company C³, this organization, 25-28 Dec 44. In addition, a gas school was conducted for two (2) days at this Headquarters, and a Brockway school for three (3) days, attended by the motor sergeant, two (2) mechanics, and two (2) men from each company.

As the period ends, construction of obstacles, patrolling and reconnaissance of roads and bridges, and guarding of bridges continues.

For the Commanding Officer:

ROBERT E. MUSSER
1st Lt., CE
Adjutant

1 Incl: Unit Journal w/annexes

³ 1st Lt John G. Graham's platoon, Company C, conducted the corduroy road school. Entries in the Daily Journal of the 206th Engineer Combat Battalion for 24 Dec 44 are: "*Msg #1 – 0845 – Capt. Davis to Lt. Graham – Wants him to come over and pick him up and recon for site for corduroy trng. site. To Capt. Patterson – Same info.*", "*Msg #8 – 1020 – Capt. Davis – Returned from recon for corduroy road trng. site*", "*Msg #17 – 1503 – Capt. Davis to Lt. Richards – Wants info on demonstration by Lt. Graham. Thinks he will be ready to go by morning.*"