

General Patton Crossing the Moselle River

by Jesse Hicks

In "The History of the 167th Engineer Combat Battalion", there is a brief account of how a provisional platoon made up of H&S Company personnel assisted Company A and Company B in building a bridge to cross the Moselle River in France. The Moselle River flows 338 miles through France, Luxembourg and Germany. It is a tributary of the Rhine.

The provisional platoon was made up of mechanics, clerks, truck drivers, and other specialists from H&S Company. The platoon was commanded by Captain James J. Donnelly.

I, Jesse Hicks, was part of that provisional platoon and the Moselle was a tough assignment. We were being bombarded by German artillery from a hill across the river. As soon as we'd get the bridge completed, the Germans would knock it out again. It was over two weeks of work, a good deal of it under fire.

The 167th was there to support the XII Corp crossing at Dieuouard, France. The XII Corp, commanded by Major General Manton S. Eddy, was part of General George Patton's U.S. Third Army. XII Corps assaulted across the Moselle River at Dieulouard on September 13, 1944, and heavy fighting ensued for three days as the Germans attempted to collapse the bridgehead.

On September 12th the 167th assisted Company B in constructing a vehicle ford across the river. We were under intermittent artillery fire most of the

day. On the 13th, we assisted Company A in the replacement of assault boat pontoons of an Infantry Support Bridge damaged by shrapnel. We were under constant fire and often had to dive into a ditch or the water to escape death or injury. The 167th received a written commendation from Major General Eddy for the work we did during this period.

At one point during those tense days, Elmer Castle and I were laying in a roadside ditch trying to shield ourselves from enemy artillery fire. A jeep came roaring down the road. Someone was standing in the jeep shouting, "*Let's go. Let's go!*" The jeep swing around after several minutes and left.

I turned to Elmer and asked, "*Who was that?*"

Elmer looked wide-eyed at me and said, "*That was General Patton. I saw his two pearl-handled pistols.*"

In fact, later Patton angrily corrected a newspaper reporter who asked about those pearl handles. He sharply explained, "*They are ivory handles. Only a New Orleans pimp would carry a pearl-handled gun.*"

Elmer and I stand corrected. But, I think in the heat of the moment we might be forgiven for incorrectly identifying them as pearl, not ivory.





Photos of the Bridge over the Moselle River near Dieuouard, France.