



## Crossing the Moselle River

### **Memoirs of SSgt. Rocko Gedaro, Company C, 357th Infantry, 90th Division.**

I am writing this experience because I have read in the newspapers and veteran magazines that 1200 WWII veterans die each day. They all stress that we should tell our stories so that our children and others would realize that "WAR IS HELL."

It is 0200 hours and I cannot sleep thinking of WWII (58 years ago).

I remember it this morning as if it were yesterday. We were on the banks of the Moselle River and had been told earlier that we were to attack at 0500 and at 0400 the artillery, mortars, and machine guns would open fire on the enemy positions on the opposite bank. At 0400 our firing began and it stopped at 0500 and my squad climbed into pontoon boats. There were 4 to 6 men in each boat and we had to paddle to the opposite shore and attack the enemy.

We paddled as fast as we could, all the while, the enemy sent flares into the sky, lighting up our crossing and firing mortar and artillery shells at us. My boat and some others made it to the other side. Other boats overturned due to the swollen and swift current of the Moselle. Others were hit with mortar and artillery fire.

We jumped out of our boats and started to fire our rifles at the top of the bank. We received no return fire and climbed to the top of the river bank. There we saw one of the best sites and surprises of the war. In front of us was a trench about 5 ft. deep and about 2 ft. wide. It ran quite a long way, mostly to the left of where we were and at our right, it curved and went inland. On our right side front, were trees, probably 3 or 4, about twenty to thirty feet tall. We jumped into the trench and knew that we would not have to dig a foxhole tonight.

The Germans had retreated and we were alone.

At 1400 word came down to us to be on the lookout for a counter attack and see if we can take any prisoners if they do counter attack. Just before darkness, the Germans counter attacked. We didn't know how many of them there were. They had very little cover and we kept firing at them. Some of us who had German pistols and other stuff began to throw them into the Moselle River. I threw my German luger pistol into the river. We didn't want to be caught with them for fear of what they would do to us. As it happened, we stopped them cold and they turned and ran. As darkness came, one enemy soldier was wounded and kept moaning "Ma, ma, ma" all evening long. This was terrible to listen to all evening and if we could, we would have killed him. It was very demoralizing. At midnight we could hear the enemy moving around. We surmised that the Germans were removing their wounded and dead.



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As daylight arrived we saw two German medics waving a white flag and motioning to us that they wanted to remove their wounded and dead. This, we let them do and it was a peaceful morning.

In the afternoon we had several bullets hit the dirt in our trench and looked to see if we were being attacked. No enemy was in sight. We figured it was snipers firing from the trees. The three of us in the trench decided that I was closest to the trees. I would fire a clip of bullets into the trees and move to a new position, then the second man would do the same thing and then the third man would fire and hope we would hit the sniper. We got lucky. A sniper fell from the branch he was tied to and hung there. All three of us emptied our clip into him. We wanted to make sure he was dead. A short time later another sniper jumped or fell from the trees. We could not see him. A few minutes later I heard what sounded like a person running towards us. I backed away from the corner towards my men.

The sniper came around the corner and I yelled "Hand De Hock" (meaning, put your hands above your head). He stopped and quickly did as I ordered him to. He was young and frightened. He did not have a rifle and I searched him for a pistol.

He had none.

When he fell or jumped he must have become confused and ran right into us. We had our prisoner. I led him down our trench to our Sergeant and he sent him to the rear for questioning. That sniper never knew how lucky he was to be alive. All combat infantrymen hated and despised snipers. Snipers would hide and fire at us. Sometime wounding or killing some of our men. We had no use for them.

I often think of that day and think how lucky that sniper was that we let him live. Then, I think of how lucky we were that we didn't kill him.

I think that perhaps God spared me because I lived through the war. Strange things happen in a war. I am sure other soldiers have had strange experiences.

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