

# Jagst River Crossing

by Tom Tillett, 398-H

*Following is Tom Tillett's account of 398th Co H experiences above Jagsfeld on April 6 and 7, 1945 as part of the advance by 398th 2d Battalion in the area of Heilbronn, Germany.*

We had a very early breakfast and then loaded up to the river at dawn to cross over in small boats then walk on along the North side of the Jagst River about a mile. As a machine gun section from the 2nd platoon we were spread along a wide ditch just below the power station on the river. The power station used hydraulic power from a low dam. Across the river stretched a wide flat grassy area about 200 yards across and then to a further sharp rise with a line of trees. As we settled in there in this ditch and peered over to see what was ahead we could see the figures of the Germans along the tree line and shooting down at us. As daylight settled in and the light was brighter it was clear that we were to cross the stream/river Jagst and this broad meadow under fire.

Behind us there was a small village and prominently a church steeple on the hill. Our mortars were set up there and began to pump shells into the German line. Ray Hatley, our forward observer had a great view from the steeple and it seemed that they could now report that the Germans were backing off the line at the top of the hill in front of us and we were told to advance.

It was ok at first but after crossing along the top of the dam we still had to run across the open field with our Heavy Weapons and ammo to get some shelter under the bank there at the railroad. There were still enough of the Germans left to keep firing at us despite the mortar fire and we could hear their ricochets from the German Burp Guns all around but you knew that you could not stop at that point. Then even as we reached that cover the orders were to move up and keep the advance. The first bold step was to simply leave our cover to run across the tracks and again huddle on the embankment with bullets flying in on us. One at a time we slipped across and then we moved up the hill.

As we reached the tree line above the field and orchard seemed to be empty, the Germans had moved on back to the town and now had shelter in the buildings about 500 yards further on. At this distance they could only use their rifles not the Burp Guns. We stretched out towards the town above but were quickly pinned down there in the open and dug some shallow trenches. The Germans had tanks several 1,000 yards ahead at a crossing and they had set up a preset field of fire just to our left. These 88's from the tanks kept screaming in all afternoon but fortunately they were locked on to a ravine on our left. Rifle fire kept our heads to the ground and things looked very bad. Riflemen from company G were dug in to my right and Captain Einsman was trying to get them to fall back. The Riflemen were frozen there until he and Charley Compton ran out there and actually picked up some of them bodily and carried them back to the Railroad Tracks below us. Charlie actually came back a second time to pull more of them out.

It was a long afternoon but we were finally told to withdraw and back down we went. As it was getting toward dusk we moved out along this Railroad to a small farm about a mile down the track. There was a very large barn there and we stretched out in the straw for an exhausted sleep. It had been a very long day.

I have been back there several times to walk over this ground and also on the train coming up from Zurich and heading for Frankford and had no trouble in recognizing the site, the power plant and even the small Railroad Hut there at the crossing in the woods we passed going up the hill. My favorite view is from the Castle at Bad Wimpfen high on the cliff above the Neckar. Most of this site has changed not a bit although they have added a steel foot bridge across the Jagst right there below the power plant so if we come back it should be easier to run across the next time.