

1340 ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION



AFRICA • MOROCCO • TUNISIA • SICILY
ENGLAND • NORMANDY • FRANCE • LUXEMBOURG
BELGIUM • GERMANY ... CZECHOSLOVAKIA

the big job ahead. This training reached its climax in the summer and fall of that year when the men were given extensive training in assault amphibious operations. When, on October 24th 1942, the 2nd Battalion (later the 1340th Engr Combat Bn) sailed from Newport News, Virginia, the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment began its illustrious overseas service.

As part of the American Armies landed in North Africa to start the action that destroyed the Afrika Korps, the 2nd Battalion landed on November 8th 1942 (D-Day) near Fedela, French Morocco. The battalion then moved to the city of Casablanca, where the 1st Battalion joined them ten days later. There the Regiment spent three months as port engineers, stopping the back-breaking work of unloading the mountains of supplies that fed the famous Western Task Force only long enough to construct and guard Camp d'Anfa, the scene of the Casablanca Conference between Roosevelt and Churchill.

As if to catch up with the war, the 20th left Casablanca on the 15th of March and moved up through the Atlas Mountains, Algeria, and into the Tunisian Campaign. Here the Regiment went from the glory (though history may not record it) of entering Bizerte before the infantry, to the ignomy of removing thousands of mines after the war in Africa had ended.

After a "short bit" of training and a "long bit" of physical conditioning, the 20th invaded Sicily, landing on D-Day (July 10, 1943) and as Seventh Army Engineers, removed mines, built by-passes, opened roads, and constructed innumerable bridges in General Patton's 39-day sweep through the island.

On November 11th the Regiment sailed from Palermo, Sicily, for the United Kingdom, disembarking near Glasgow, Scotland, on the 27th of the same month. Moving down to Carclew Estate, near Truro in Cornwall County, England, the Regiment took the task of building camps and hospitals for troops undergoing maneuvers in preparation for the invasion of France. This was the last station of the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment as such.

General Order No. 6, Headquarters SOS, ETOUSA, was the scrap of paper that on January 21, 1944, redesignated the 2nd Battalion of the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment as the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion. The Battalion, being assigned to the First United States Army and attached to the 1171st Engr Combat Group (which was attached to V Corps), moved from its location at Carclew Estate to Wiveliscombe, in Somerset County.

At Wiveliscombe the Battalion was billeted in Niessen huts, five minutes from the "pubs" and 45 minutes from the larger town of Taunton. But here training for the Battle of Europe was conducted in earnest. Training in Bridges: Bailey, Treadway, and Ponton; training in mine removal and assault tactics; schools in radio, bomb disposal, first aid, water purification, chemical warfare, and surveying; physical conditioning: hikes, athletics, calisthenics, and close order drill;all were crammed into the spring months of 1944.

On 17th of May the Battalion severed its connections with Wiveliscombe and moved south to a marshalling area near Callington, Cornwall County; on 30th May it boarded LST's in Plymouth Harbor to make the long awaited invasion of "The Continent".

When the Allies assaulted the Normandy Beaches on June 6th, 1944, the battalion commander and 17 key personnel landed on the Fox-Red section of the famous Omaha Beach, going ashore with elements of the 1st Infantry Division. Being pinned down by heavy artillery and mortar fire, the detachment's activities were limited to only short reconnaissance missions. After efforts to contact the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 1st Engineer Combat Battalion, they spent their first night on the continent shivering in shallow foxholes in a small draw some two hundred yards from the edge of the water.

The following morning "A" Company moved ashore, followed by the remainder of the Battalion the next day. The Battalion was then assigned an area of responsibility for engineer maintenance. Roads were kept open, obstacles

and mines were removed from the beach, and water points were set up to supply the First and Second Divisions.

On June 9th, "A" Company was attached to the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Division, with the mission of providing the 38th Combat Team a crossing of the Aure River near Trevieres. The approach road to the bridge site was blocked; the road block was covered with accurate and effective small arms fire. Three volunteers rode up to the obstacle on a Sherman tank, planted a charge, jumped back onto the tank, and rode away as the road block was blown clear. That night the company moved to the river, and under fire constructed a 50' double-single Bailey Bridge. The 38th Combat Team moved across on schedule the next morning. This marked the building of the first bridge of the campaign. The three volunteers were awarded the Silver Star; the company commander of "A" Company was awarded the Bronze Star.

The Battalion moved up to La Mine and on the 13th of June was attached to the 2nd Division to set up defensive positions in the Cerisy Forest in anticipation of a major counterattack. The counterattack did not develop and the Battalion went back to its tasks as Corps Engineers. On the 20th of June, "C" Company constructed a two-way, class unlimited, railroad grade crossing at Le Molay which greatly unravelled the traffic congestion at that point.

On 23 June the Battalion moved to Balleroy and continued in its role as Corps Engineers..... maintaining roads, operating water points and gravel pits, and making road and bridge reconnaissance. The climax of this work came when the entire battalion was used in constructing "Victor Circle" in the Cerisy Forest.

This traffic circle was constructed at a point where seven busy roads converged. In five days, the Battalion, with the company commander of "C" Company acting as "consulting engineer" and directing the work, moved trees, stumps, houses, and pillboxes; graded and surfaced the 40 ft. roadway; and installed a system of drainage..... all without stopping traffic. The work of the 1340th on this

task can be summarized by quoting Lt. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow, then commander of V Corps: "The 1340th Engineers..... demonstrated great skill and engineering finesse in the expeditious construction of this important project."

Swinging into the position for the dash through the St. Lo corridor, the 1340th moved from Balleroy to the town of Cerisy La Foret. On 30th July the Battalion was placed in support of the 7th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 5th Infantry Division; this mission lasted only two days. On 1 August the Battalion was placed in support of the 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Division. As the Second pushed south toward Vire, the Battalion cleared roads of mines, road blocks, and wrecked vehicles. On 2nd August "B" Company provided a crossing of the Souleuvre River just south of Campeaux. This crossing consisted of constructing a 110' triple-single Bailey Bridge, a 45' treadway bridge and two by-pass roads. From Major General W. M. Robertson, 2nd Division Commander, came, ".....well done." Then on 9 August, "C" Company's construction under fire of a Bailey Bridge overpass northeast of Vire drew another letter of commendation, this time from Colonel E. K. Daley, commander of 1171st Engineer Combat Group. On the 18th the 1340th, relieved of this direct support mission, gave indirect support to the 80th Infantry Division, which was crushing the Falaise pocket. Then began the race to Paris!

The battalion moved 68 miles overnight to Saes, and on 25th August moved on 126 miles to the outskirts of the French Capital. Here reconnaissance was made, though the city was not completely cleared, to determine the condition of the bridges over the Seine; the battalion gathered its loose ends in preparation for the move northward to Belgium.

By now the 1340th had made its mark in Engineer circles. In three months of combat operations, the "young" battalion had earned three letters of commendation. It had built seven bridges, it had removed hundreds of land mines, and it had cleared miles and miles of roads..... always

under pressure and always expediting the advance of the troops of "First U. S. Army's famous V Corps".

The Battalion pushed on past Paris on August 30th, pulling up at Senlis. On the 3rd of September it began a long motor march behind CCB of the 5th Armored Division, which was in hot pursuit of the enemy toward Belgium. The 1340th entered Belgium on the 9th of September and Luxembourg on the 11th. It was now in support of the 28th Infantry Division; this support consisted of keeping open and maintaining the Regimental Main Supply Routes.

On 19 September 1944 the Battalion entered Germany near Welchenhausen. One of the 1340th's claims to fame is that the construction of a timber trestle bridge here by "B" Company marked the first bridge built in Germany by the American Forces. It was here, while carrying out experiments on the pillboxes to determine the amount of explosives necessary to demolish the steel and concrete fortifications, that the Battalion first came to grips with the vaunted Siegfried Line.

The 28th Division moved back into Belgium on the 4th of October and took up positions east of Krinkelt. The 1340th moved back with them, bivouacing near Camp Elsenborn. Here the "battle of the mud" began. Secondary roads which were carrying supply loads were rebuilt and long hours were spent opening bleeder drains and ditches.

The Battalion, still with the 28th Division, moved north back into Germany on 26th of October. A rear command post was established two miles east of Rotgen; a forward command post was established closer to the front, near Vossenack, in the Hurtgen Forest.

When, in early November, the 28th Infantry Division attacked toward Schmidt on the upper Roer, the 1340th was committed as infantry. Here a separate chapter in the history of this organization was written in blood and agony.

The Division met extremely heavy opposition in the attack and the 1340th moved up to keep open the route for supplies to get through. To keep this route open meant

to take and hold a bridge in this vicinity and to protect the flanks of this route. In this vital and exposed position, and with no supporting weapons, the 1340th held firm against murderous and unrelenting artillery and mortar fire; it repulsed numerous small counterattacks and infiltrating patrols; it watched its supply trains, needed desperately, shattered by deadly mortar fire; and it endured, with grossly inadequate protection, the merciless fury of winter at its worst.

After four days, when the Infantry troops were withdrawn across the river, the 1340th had completed its 4-day mission in hell (061200A — 100500A November 1944). The battalion had suffered 75% casualties among those committed to action and had lost much equipment; but with one day's rest went back to maintaining roads in the Hurtgen Foerst.

The 1340th is proud to remember that in the two months succeeding this action, U. S. troops did not retake that vital and exposed position.

Licking its wounds and filling its gaps with reinforcements, the Battalion continued to maintain and improve the Hurtgen Forest road net. On November 20th the Battalion was placed in support of the 8th Infantry Division, which had taken over the 28th's sector there. During this support, the Battalion removed enemy mines and laid several minefields, maintained the Division MSR, and conducted night patrols over the roads to insure constant maintenance.

When the Ardennes Breakthrough came, and as V Corps turned to anchor the north flank of the Bulge, the 1340th moved back into Belgium and into billets at Sart Le Spa, just east of Verviers. This was the first time the organization had been in billets since landing on the continent. Here "A" Company laid and maintained a 5,000 yard antipersonnel minefield. Later the whole battalion engaged in a furious battle with the snow. The road net which the Battalion maintained here was highly important because over these roads passed the supplies for the divisions crushing the Bulge. The roads were icy and constantly

drifting high with snow, requiring bull-dozers, graders, and snow-plows to work day and night. Wrecker stations were set up at strategic points in the net to aid vehicles in distress. During this period the Battalion celebrated its first anniversary (21 January 1945) and shortly afterward, on January 29th, moved to Camp Elsenborn again.

Here the Battalion was again placed in support of the 2nd Infantry Division. As the Division retook Krinkelt and pushed past "Heartbreak Corner" toward the town of Schleiden, the Battalion kept the muddy and treacherous roads of that section open, removed and destroyed hundreds of mines, and built bridges to aid the push.

The Battalion reentered Germany on 2 March and was placed in support of the 28th Division; during that Division's push toward the Rhine, the Battalion constructed within a week seven bridges to expedite the push. On 14 March, it was relieved of this support mission and, on the 21st, placed in support of the 9th Armored Division, moved across the Rhine River to Honningen in the Remagen bridgehead.

On the 24th of March "A" Company built a 150' triple-double Bailey Bridge over the Weid River at Irlich. This bridge opened up the great armored thrust that sped up through the heart of Germany and sealed off the Ruhr. The 1340th swept with this push, building bridges and clearing roads for the Combat Commands of the 9th Armored Division.

On 6th of April the Battalion was placed in support of the 2nd Division to provide a crossing of the Weser River. his job fell to "C" Company, which built a 324' treadway bridge at Veckerhagen. The 2nd moved across and secured the bridgehead; the 9th Armored moved across and into position for another thrust.

Again, on 10 April, the Battalion was placed in support of the 9th Armored Division and sped on from the Weser toward Leipzig, building bridges and clearing roads. When the American Armies pulled up at the Mulde River, the 1340th stopped at Bad Lausick, south of Leipzig. On 27th of April, a 70' double-single Bailey bridge, constructed

over the Mulde River near Eilenburg, replaced lighter bridges used by the 69th Infantry Division in its link-up with the Russian Forces at Torgau.

On April 30th, the Battalion moved south to Kirchenlamitz, Germany, maintaining roads, making reconnaissance, and opening supply routes. On 6 May the 1340th was transferred to the Third United States Army, and on 8 May 1945, the Battalion received the news of the unconditional surrender of Germany, effective 090001A May 1945.

The Battalion moved into Czechoslovakia on May 10th, continuing its Corps Engineer tasks and was billeted in hotels in the town of Marienbad. Later, on May 20th, it moved to the resort town of Babylon near Domazlice.

A veteran organization looked at its eight battle stars and thought of home.

CITATION FOR THE BRONZE STAR

Technician Fourth Grade Nicholas Gapanovich, 32939952, 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion, United States Army. For meritorious service in connection with military operations against an armed enemy from 8 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, in France, Belgium, and Germany. The technical skill, zeal, and alacrity with which Technician Fourth Grade Gapanovich performed his duties as Radio Operator and Technician contributed materially to the combat efficiency of his organization during operations on the Continent of Europe. His initiative and exemplary devotion to duty exemplify the finest traditions of the service. Entered military service from Brooklyn, New York.

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