

1950

The Famous 299th

Dale R. Thayer

United States Army

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Recommended Citation

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the Memory of the brave
officers and enlisted men who gave
their lives in the name of Freedom
while members of this organization.

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FOREWARD

The information contained in this History, OUR RECORD, was compiled only after exhaustive research through Battalion records, general and special orders, morning reports and various experiences of members of this organization.

It is a tribute to each and every Officer and Enlisted Man, a truly great record of our part in the world's greatest conflict as members of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion.

ALFRED E. DIORIO
CWO USA
ASSISTANT ADJUTANT

ADOMAB
OLBUB
YFABELL
OR ROONAB

STAFF

Commanding Officer -----	Lt. Col. Milton A. Jewett
Executive Officer -----	Major Fred E. Kohler
Operations and Training (S-3) -----	Major Edwin R. Perry
Operations and Training (Assistant) -----	1st Lt. John H. Anderson
Assistant Division Engineer -----	Capt. Richard A. Steen
Intelligence (S-2) -----	Capt. Morris G. West
Intelligence (Assistant) -----	1st Lt. Elmer A. Kirchenwitz
Supply (S-4) -----	Capt. Charles J. Lamb
Supply (Assistant) -----	CWO Emanuel Gitomer
Adjutant (S-1) -----	1st Lt. James W. Plachy
Assistant Adjutant -----	CWO Alfred E. DiOrio
Reconnaissance -----	1st Lt. Robert M. Stribling
Motor Transport -----	1st Lt. Harold R. Jenkins
Assistant Motor Transport -----	WOJG James W. Tucker
Medical Officer -----	Capt. James H. Miller
Dental Officer -----	Capt. Garson L. Kahn

COMPANY COMMANDERS

Headquarters and Service Company -----	Capt. James G. Cameron
Company "A" -----	Capt. Robert E. Manniko
Company "B" -----	Capt. Ambrose L. Manion
Company "C" -----	Capt. William J. Bunting



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When he arrived in Camp White, Oregon, on that spring day in 1943 few men of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion realized the vigor and perseverance concealed beneath the pleasant face and stocky body of Lt. Col. Milton A. Jewett.

His easy going movements and slow speech gave no hint of his abilities which later were recognized by the highest quarters and ultimately led to the award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

Colonel Jewett, we never had the time nor the place to express to you our sentiments. Therefore, we are devoting this page to you and with it our best wishes for a future as fine as your army career.

—The Officers and Men of the Famous 299th



The day following my return from Paris Mr. DiOrio, the Assistant Adjutant of our Battalion, sent for me. I was given a job to do a job which I did not and still do not know whether I have accomplished satisfactorily. That decision is up to you.

I was chosen to write the history of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion because of my job as Personnel Sergeant and the fact that I was a cadremán of the Battalion. I have, in the past, known nearly every man in the Famous 299th either by name or sight, and there was a time when I could name the correct company of every man in our organization. As personnel sergeant I came into personal contact with most of the men either through personal matters or for financial reasons.

I shall always treasure the fine comradeship of the many friends I met in our battalion—Cy Riley, Jimmy Evanoff, Harold Stillwell, Nick DeAngelis—who gave their lives, and Whitey Stallmeyer, The Sheriff, Dee, Mitch, Norm, Stan Green, Larry Dodge, Stress, and hundreds of others whom I hope to see again in better surroundings.

In many cases this history will name a certain officer. This was done because that officer's name required less space than a list of all the men under him. Therefore, wherever you find the name of your platoon leader, company commander, or squad leader, each member of that particular platoon, company, or squad is entitled to the full credit given.

I have thoroughly enjoyed reviewing the old records, special orders, company orders and morning reports, to compile and relive those 960 days of events in the famous 299th

In closing I wish to add that the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was demobilized at 2400 17 October 1945. We surely left a heavy footprint in the sands of time.

Sincerely yours,

Dale R. Thayer





CHAPTER I

Activation and Training

The hot desert sun beat down upon the group of toiling, sweating men participating in the Desert Maneuvers in the Painted Desert Area of Southern California; when, like a sudden cooling breeze word began to circulate that a cadre was to be shipped from this hot, sandy area. Less than a week later, on 28 February 1943, 62 officers and enlisted men of the first battalion, 355th Engineer General Service Regiment emerged from the early morning haze of the desert and boarded a Southern Pacific train at Indio, California. The officer in charge carried with him orders assigning these men to the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, to be activated at Camp White, Oregon.

Camp White, Oregon was the birthplace of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion. The camp is located in the flat valley north of Medford, Oregon, and is surrounded on all sides by high, forested mountains. The most prominent mountain is Mount McLoughlin towering 9493 feet into the sky. The Rogue River winds its way through the valley, known as the Agate Desert, and descends through the Coast Range of the Cascades to the Pacific Ocean. The Agate Desert gained its name because of the large amount of this precious stone found there. Several members of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion found various species of agates. The vicinity of Camp White is America's number one producer of pears. Members of the Battalion took advantage of this and mailed or shipped home crates of the famous Medford pears.

At 0200 the cadre arrived at the gates of Camp White in Greyhound coaches. Eight hours later at 1000 3 March 1943 General Order No. 1 announced the activation of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion. Several officers were awaiting the arrival of the cadre and immediately upon the activation of the unit each officer and enlisted man was assigned a specific task and duty—duties which grew in variety, magnitude and efficiency to attain such heights of loyalty and devotion as is seldom attained in any military organization.

The first vehicle issued to the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was a bicycle. Everyone from the Commanding Officer to the toolroom keeper used this mode of travel to obtain rations, supplies, requisitioned materials and numerous other items.

Word came that shortly our first group of men would arrive. On 14 March 1943 the first group, totaling 180 enlisted men, arrived at the Camp White railhead. These men travelled from the 1213th Reception Station at Fort Niagara, New York. Thereafter trainloads of men arrived nearly every day—all of them from Fort Niagara, New York—until our strength was built up to Battalion level. These men were all New Yorkers. Many of them grew up with their fellow soldiers and had known them for years. Most of them came from Buffalo, Auburn, Niagara Falls, Rochester, Syracuse and several smaller towns in this area of New York State. Upon seeing this, it was evident that our Battalion was destined to become a powerful force.

Each officer and enlisted man was assigned a job as soon as possible. The training schedule was drawn up and training commenced the latter part of March 1943. Close order drill, extended order drill, practice rifle marksmanship, use and types of engineer tools, rigging, bridge construction, and basic demolition. Easter Sunday 1943 found the Battalion on the rifle range at Camp White.

Less than a month after activation the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion began promoting men to the noncommissioned ranks. Captain Flickinger, a cadre officer, was relieved as commanding officer and Lt. Colonel Milton A. Jewett (then Major) assumed command of the Battalion on 16 April 1943. Major Fred E. Kohler (then Captain) was assigned to the Battalion on 24 April 1943. On 7 May 1943 Major George G. Mooney assumed command of the Battalion and Lt. Colonel Jewett (then Major) became Executive Officer.

Basic training was completed by the end of June. July arrived and sun-tans. On 4 July 1943, the Battalion moved out of Camp White by motor enroute to the Oregon Maneuver Area for the purpose of participating in the IV Corps tests and maneuvers. It was a beautiful sunny day and the Battalion was on the road most of the day, travelling through majestic sugar pine forests and winding through the scenic Cascade Range.

LaPine, Oregon was selected as our bivouac area. It is a tiny village on the border of the High Desert and within sight of the snowcapped Three Sisters and Latchelor Mountains of the Cascade Range. Who will ever forget those hot days, heavy with the fresh scent of pine, icy cold nights typical of the desert country, swimming in the cold Deschutes River winding its way from the snowy mountain tops to the Columbia River, and sun baths along its grassy banks? There was work, too. Cutting, trimming and hauling logs for telephone and communication poles from the pine forests around our bivouac area. These poles were hauled all over the Oregon Maneuver Area, some trips requiring three days travelling time. Roads were constructed through the hot, dusty desert. Officers and men were granted passes to Bend, Oregon. One can never forget those delicious T-bone steaks, tasty baking, and the lack of beer.

299th Engineer Combat Battalion vehicles were common sights in other towns—Burns, Lakeview, and tiny dots in the desert, including Brothers Lake and Silver Lake, Wagonwheels, and Buffalo, Oregon.

On 9 September 1943 Major Mooney was transferred and Lt. Colonel Jewett (then Major) again assumed command of the Battalion. Also, about this time, we moved out of LaPine to a spot in the Desert known as Milepost 79 and prepared for the first problem of the maneuvers. At noon, maneuver problem number one began and by midnight that night nearly all of Headquarters and Service Company had been taken "prisoner" by the "enemy." Not a very good start for us, but we later proved our worth!

The Oregon Maneuvers continued throughout the months of September and October, 1943. The last of October marked the end of the last maneuver problem and the Battalion consolidated in one area, packed up, and prepared to move northward. Bright and early on the morning of 1

November 1943 the lead truck pulled out of the area and the others followed. Throughout the day the convoy travelled past picturesque desert country, up the magnificent Cow Canyon and, turning westward, twisted back and forth through the scenic wildness of the Cascade Range, around beautiful snow-covered Mount Hood. The night was spent in the State Fair grounds at Gresham, outside of Portland. The following day we moved through Portland and crossed the bridge spanning the Columbia River, whose shorelines twinkled with the lights of war industries. Entering Washington State, the convoy rolled on through Kelso, Centralia, and Olympia, and in the afternoon arrived at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Fort Lewis is one of the largest camps west of the Mississippi River. Its grounds are beautifully landscaped, and ample theater and Post Exchange facilities are available there. Nearby are the cities of Olympia, Tacoma and Seattle. November 1943 at Fort Lewis was a busy month for the Battalion. Preparations were begun at once for overseas movement. We were assigned to the Fourth Army and began a steady stream of inspections, physicals, day and night infiltration, endurance tests. Everyone had made up his mind that we were practically "on the pier." Suddenly everything changed! An order was distributed and, when the men read it, a new light came into their eyes. Yes, we were being shipped, but not overseas. We were going to Florida!

The morning of 7 December 1943 the Executive Officer and Operations Officer departed by plane for Florida. Also, Companies A and B with the Lattation equipment entrained out of the Fort Lewis station on the first lap of the journey. The following day at 1900 hours the second train, carrying Company C and Headquarters and Service Company, glided out of Fort Lewis into the fog. For six days these trains raced across the continent. Over the Cascade Range of Washington, through Cascade Tunnel, across the northern tip of Idaho and Montana, into North Dakota, and southward to the Twin Cities and Chicago. In the early hours of the fourth morning the train glided through the flat snow-covered Indiana countryside and by midmorning stopped at Cincinnati. Losing little time, the train rumbled over the Ohio River, through hilly Kentucky; Tennessee was reached at dusk and the next morning found us in sunny Georgia. Windows were raised and heads protruded one by one. Your heart sang as you inhaled the clean, warm, pine-scented air. At Albany, Georgia, the second train grated to a stop beside the first section. The second train pulled out first and by midafternoon both were standing, panting, in the

Jacksonville, Florida station. At sunset, the trains departed on the last leg of the journey. We looked out the Pullman window as the moon rose and saw for the first time its shimmering reflections on the silvery stretches of the Atlantic.

The Battalion arrived in Fort Pierce during the night of 14 December 1943; however, did not detrain until about 0630 on the 15th. After breakfast we formed into companies and marched through Fort Pierce, across the Indian River, and over the swing bridge to South Island, our new station. The camp was known as The United States Naval Amphibious Training Base (USNATB). The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was the only Army unit located on the post, it being a naval station. Billets consisted of reinforced pyramidal tents, with wooden floors and screened sidewalls. Food, Post Exchange supplies, and medical treatment were under the supervision of the Navy. Our higher headquarters was the Joint Army-Navy Testing Board and the XIII Corps. Two days after our arrival at Fort Pierce, a cadre was drawn from our unit and sent to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, to activate the 289th Engineer Combat Battalion. Our training commenced immediately, under the supervision of the Army-Navy Testing Board. Headquarters of the Board were located in the Peacock Building in Fort Pierce, as was our own headquarters. Each officer and enlisted man received a minimum of 10 days training, which began with a few lectures and practice mock-up operations. Training later branched out into debarkation, LCP and other landing-craft identification, basic demolition, new tactics in hand-to-hand combat, assault beach landings, crawling onto a beach, capsizing, fighting, and rowing a rubber pontoon boat, boat landings, fording, and boat-team training. Other groups received valuable training in advanced demolition and experimental demolition on North Island.

Our life at Fort Pierce wasn't all work. Evenings, weekends, and many afternoons were spent on the long sandy beaches of North and South Islands, facing the Atlantic. Passes were given to Fort Pierce. Who will ever forget The Duck Inn, Johnnie's, Ann's, and Whispering Pines? Weekends were spent in the magic cities of Palm Beach and Miami; at night clubs and hotels where our money flowed like wine. Remember Ta-boo, Casablanca, The George Washington, Dixie Court, Brass Rail, and Mother Cary's; Delicate Frank's, Flamingo, and Cocoonut Grove?

By mid February our training had been completed and announce-

ment came of a big demonstration on North Island for the benefit of the "high brass." The 299th Engineers furnished the guard of honor and took a very active part in the demonstration itself. Everything met with high approval and favorable comment for our unit. The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion began to move into the limelight.

1 March 1944 the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion bade farewell to Florida and moved by train northward through the warm southern breezes. The following day personnel of the battalion detrained into the cold, frigid winds of the north at Camp Pickett, Virginia. We hopped into trucks and were transported across the camp to our billets. Fires were already going, the barracks were scrubbed, and a hot meal served. Usual camp duties were carried out at Camp Pickett, including short marches, marksmanship, grenade throwing, and practice mock-up. While at Camp Pickett most of us got our first look at a German prisoner. Several were working there. Furloughs of one week were granted to all personnel who had not had one within the last six months.





CHAPTER II

Embarkation for and Training in England

The month of March 1944 really seemed to fly! On 1 April 1944 the Battalion was alerted and travelled by rail from Camp Pickett enroute to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. The following day, personnel of the organization detrained at the huge railhead, and upon arrival at our billets were almost immediately thrust into a whirlpool of activity. Within the next 36 hours, we were given three showdown inspections, ordnance inspection, physical inspection, briefed on censorship regulations, security regulations, what to do if captured by the enemy, use of gas masks, tour through the gas chamber, debarkation training, life aboard ship, and innumerable other activities. Records were checked and rechecked, rosters prepared and kept up to the minute, strength of the Battalion checked and double checked. A "hush hush" went up every time the words "299th" were mentioned, and we were instructed to refer to our unit as 5001 PP.

Finally April 4 rolled around and Company A of 5001 PP departed from Camp Kilmer in the early morning, to arrive at the New York Port of Embarkation two hours later. Here the men boarded a ship known as the S.S. Exchequer. Believing this to be a "dry run," the men took the whole incident good-naturedly. The following day, Lt. Colonel Jewett (then Major) departed from Camp Kilmer by air transport, enroute to

London. Meanwhile, Companies B, C, and Headquarters and Service of 5001 PP marched in a long, proud, orderly column thru the rain-swept streets of Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to the waiting train. Three hours later they arrived at the Jersey station, boarded a ferry boat, and were moved upstream to the pier where the S. S. Exchequer waited. A military band played snappy tunes and American Red Cross girls served coffee and doughnuts. Needless to say, this brightened a lot of sadly dampened spirits. Soon a roll was called and one by one the men struggled up the gang-plank with their heavy loads. The band sang out with "Away Beyond the Hills of Idaho." That was the last song heard on the American continent.

Aboard ship, the men were instructed to place their equipment on their bunks and then to place themselves on their bunks. This was a physical impossibility, but many, nevertheless, attempted it. The enlisted men's quarters were below deck. The officers were assigned staterooms, which didn't mean much, since there were 11 in a room which was designed to accommodate 6. Second lieutenants got the best deal; they slept in the ship's infirmary.

The S. S. Exchequer is a cargo ship converted to troop ship. It was well fitted and very clean. Our journey brought the total number of voyages to England to three since the ship's conversion. The evening of 5 April we were allowed on the topdeck. The skyline of New York loomed above us, and the familiar skyscrapers were silhouetted in the twilight of the dying day. Our hearts were heavy as it occurred to us that this was the last evening we would see our land for a long time to come.

The next morning, 6 April, at 0920 the S. S. Exchequer slipped away from Pier 86 of the United American Lines. Everyone came on deck. There was no loud laughter and joking on that clear, beautiful April morning. Only the steady drone of the ship's motors was audible as she knifed her way through the calm channel past our lady—The Statue of Liberty. We were all wondering when we would see her again. As the sun dipped into the ocean that evening our convoy began to form. It now consisted of about 10 cargo and troop ships and a few destroyers on our extreme right and left. The position of our ship in the convoy was to be center rear. The ship's captain explained that this was because of the ship's speed.

7 April 1944 dawned bright and clear and all those able to make the deck were out. One of our men became sick on the ferry boat in New

York harbor. He was not seen on deck during the entire crossing. The convoy was formed, ships from Boston having joined us during the night, and one could not estimate the number of ships. They extended before and on each side of us as far as the eye could see. We were told that destroyers were patrolling our flanks and one battleship and heavy cruiser were leading the convoy. During the morning the transport commander briefed all officers aboard the ship on their duties during the trip. The ship's staff was introduced and it was explained that because of limited space there would be very little supervised exercise. We learned that personnel of the Seabees, Signal Corps, and civil affairs were also aboard. In the afternoon, we were given toilet kits donated by the American Red Cross and a booklet on the Life in the British Isles. This, of course, clarified any doubt as to our destination. Battle and alert stations were assigned and the day slowly faded. Words cannot describe the impressive sight of such an endless number of ships, knifing thru the dark green ocean at the same speed.

The following day, 8 April, the personnel of Company A admitted that it was quite possible that we were not practicing a "dry run." A rumor began to circulate and soon everyone that could manage, had crowded the bow of the ship. The rumor? "The ship just ahead of us has WACs and nurses aboard."

Training began late in the morning because of the time required to feed breakfast. While aboard ship, personnel were given only two meals a day. Everyone had an enormous appetite, and the chow line often extended the length of the ship. After sweating this out, many of the men lost their appetite when they passed thru the hot, steamy room where mess kits were dipped and many quit the line when they arrived at the serving table. Of course, there were others who stuck the whole thing out and anxiously awaited the next meal. Training on that day consisted of inspection of equipment and arms, and gas mask drill.

8 April 1944 was Easter Sunday. Services were held by the ship's chaplain at the ship's stern. It was one of the most impressive services ever attended by men of the 299th Engineers. The deep blue green of the ocean, in all directions, a trail of spinning white foam following in the wake of the ship, cool salty breezes blowing gently and caressing the flag on the staff, the sound of men's voices singing hymns made an unforgettable setting for the traditional Easter worship.

At 1930 the blackout came into effect. No one was allowed on open deck after this hour. Organized singing was arranged in the recreation room.

On 10 April, our training consisted of security in combat, identification of German uniform and inspection of basic arms. In the afternoon the daily ship drill was rehearsed. Also the ship's 20 mm and 40 mm AA Guns began practice firing. Around suppertime the sea began to get rough and many men did not feel like eating. As the blackout hour arrived, a fine mist was sweeping the foredeck. Headquarters and Service Company was billeted in the forward compartment. During the night, as the sea became rougher, the bow seemed to rise and fall immeasurable distances. Every known remedy for seasickness was tried; from lying flat on the back in the bunk (a tragic attempt) to placing the head between the legs. Eventually everyone gave up, and half of the company spent the night playing poker on the floor.

11 April 1944, and more training in knots and lashings, inspection of arms, aircraft identification. The first of a series of typhus shots was administered to all personnel. After the blackout became effective, an enlisted man in Company C was attacked by appendicitis. The Battalion Surgeon, Captain Earl Bohnert (then 1st Lt.), performed an operation and removed the ruptured organ. At the same time we received a submarine alert. Everyone filed onto the deck. There was no trace of panic; just the usual American humor such as "Why couldn't they wait 'til morning?" "Mother, may I go in to swim?" and countless other witticisms relieving the tension in the air. The operation was continued by Captain Bohnert. The next morning it was reported by the ship's captain that one U-boat had been sunk.

12 April dawned without sun or any sign of a quieting sea, in fact, the swells were rising, at times, higher than the ship itself. Only a wall of green, closing in on us, could be observed when the ship plunged between swells. Then, when on the crest of one, nearly every ship in the convoy could be viewed. A fine mist swept the deck and men were barred from the bow of the ship. Someone shouted "Land!", but it turned out to be a cloud formation. Everyone began to feel slightly unstable.

13 April, the usual instruction continued. The main event was the transport commander's announcement of the ship's destination: Cardiff, Wales.

14 April 1944, and land was sighted on the portside. Perhaps the remark of the day was made by an enlisted man. He said, "So this is England? I don't like it!" The blackout was lifted and smoking on the deck was permitted. The convoy began to separate, one section going to Belfast, Ireland and our section to Cardiff, Wales.

On the morning of 15 April 1944, we entered the Irish Sea and continued southward. One destroyer and 4 ships were left in our convoy. We seemed to be playing follow the leader as we threaded our way thru the English planted minefields.

16 April 1944, we entered the Bristol Channel. Here our destroyer escort left us. As she steamed past, three blasts were given over the battle siren and the commander wished us good luck thru a loud speaker. British planes zoomed over the masthead dipping their wings. It felt good to know we had allies like these. At sunset, we dropped anchor at Swansea, Wales, while waiting for the tide to come in. During the night, our ship docked at Cardiff, Wales.

17 April was spent aboard ship. Everyone was intensely interested watching our cargo, mainly mail, being unloaded. We were amused at the size of the British railway cars and laughed outright when we saw a trainman push a car by hand. It was announced that our station would be Ilfracombe. We all wondered how to pronounce it.

18 April 1944, at 0105 hours, Headquarters and Service Company, Company A, and the Medical Detachment debarked from the ship and boarded a train alongside. The cars are divided into compartments with a door opening into each from the outside. Normally these compartments accommodate 6 or 8 persons. The train started and we were amazed at the smooth riding of the cars. Companies B and C debarked at 0640 and boarded a train bound for the same destination. Both trips were uneventful. Arriving at the railroad station of Ilfracombe, we were met by trucks with our designation already painted on:—First Army.

Then we realized that Captain Richard A. Steen, CWO Alfred E. DiOrio and Staff Sergeant William J. Bishop had been busy as the advance party. We were also greeted by Lt. Colonel Jewett, who travelled

from the States by air. The last of the Battalion arrived at Braunton Hut Camp by 1400. The general appearance of the camp was not very impressive; lots of dust, and the huts didn't look much like a home. At this time our T/O strength was 32 officers and 628 enlisted men. We left the States with full T/O strength, 632 enlisted men, but had to drop 4 enlisted men who had become sick.

19 April, we received First Army's Troop Assignment No. 35, which assigned our Battalion to the First Army, upon arrival in the European Theater of Operations. We also received a secret letter from First Army dated 10 April 1944, entitled Alert Order. We noted that we had been alerted since 10 April 1944.

On 20 April Lt. Colonel Jewett called the officers together and informed them that training would begin at once. He hinted that it would be underwater demolition and removal of beach obstacles training, but refrained from going into detail.

Training commenced on 24 April, in accordance with a directive from First United States Army, titled "Underwater Demolition Training." The letter divided the battalion. Lt. Colonel Jewett hesitated to choose one company to work with VII Corps feeling that one company is equal to another. To settle the issue, a coin was flipped and Captain Manion, Company Commander of Company B, won. Company B was to work with VII Corps.

1 May 1944, the training was well underway. We learned that our training in Fort Pierce was of invaluable aid in our present job. It aided principally in helping us make decisions as to placement of charges, kind of explosive to use and manner of leaving an assault craft. Company B was then attached to VII Corps and the remainder of the Battalion, Headquarters and Headquarters and Service Company, Companies A and C and the Medical Detachment were attached to V Corps.

By 5 May, it had become evident that in spite of our recent arrival in the ETO we were scheduled to take part in some forthcoming operation. The Commanding Officer had been "bigoted," a strange word to us all, but he did not give the slightest hint as to the meaning or extent of the future operations. The men experienced some cold days during their training. The debarking from landing craft usually involves getting wet

at least chest high. The work was now being done in conjunction with favorable tides and the companies were not training at regular hours. Sometimes, the landings took place in early morning and, at other times, late in the evening. It didn't get dark until 2300.

6 May, Companies A and C were divided into boat teams. We also received men on detached service from the following organizations to fill out the boat teams: 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Regiment, 382nd, 383rd, and 684th Medical Collecting Companies.

7 May, the Deputy Chief of Staff of V Corps spoke to the officers and men of our Battalion. He disclosed for the first time that we were training for an actual operation on the European Continent. He further described the advance preparation that had been made and commended the men on the excellent work they had been doing. The most notable portion of his speech was the disclosing of the assistance we would have while performing our mission. He stated, "The number of ships, in the sea, firing over your heads at the enemy will be limited only by one factor and that is space on the sea's surface." He also spoke of the Provisional Engineer Group, composed of the 146th Engineer Combat Battalion, the 99th Engineer Combat Battalion and attached personnel. The commanding officer of the Provisional Group was Colonel O'Neill (then Lt. Colonel).

It was officially agreed, on 10 May, that after the operation when the Battalion began to function normally on the continent, we would be attached to the 1128th Engineer Combat Group, Colonel Rheinhardt, commanding.

The training period ended 14 May 1944. Lt. Colonel Jewett had assembled the remaining men of the Battalion (Company B had left Braunton Hut Camp for an unknown destination, with a portion of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion) and gave a short talk on the importance of the training they had completed. Colonel O'Neill (then Lt. Colonel) of the Provisional Group also gave a short talk and emphasized that the one thing that had to be done when the men arrived on the continent was to create 50-yard gaps through the obstacles on the beach.

On 15 May 1944, a secret letter was received stating that 237 officers

and men and the battalion's vehicles were to move to Painswick Park Camp. The Battalion was divided into a forward and rear echelon. The forward echelon consisted of all organized boat teams and the rear echelon consisted of all administrative personnel, supply and company headquarters and the vehicle drivers of the Battalion. Our vehicles were not to be used in the assault. Lt. Colonel Jewett (then Major) designated Captain Charles J. Lamb as Commanding Officer of the rear echelon.

The following day, 16 May, the rear echelon moved by motor convoy from Hut Camp to Painswick Park Camp, arriving there at 1530 hours. The forward echelon left Braunton Camp at 1300, by rail, their destination being Camp D-6 near Dorchester. While at D-6 the officers and men of the forward echelon received the very best in food and entertainment that could be obtained. Shows were run several times a day and the men were encouraged to eat all the food they desired, plus plenty of candy. Meanwhile, the personnel of the rear echelon were busy at work obtaining supplies, preparing shipping lists, and undergoing vehicular inspections.





CHAPTER III

Invasion

The morning of 1 June 1944, the men moved out of D-6 to the embarkation areas at the Port of Weymouth. Here explosives were loaded aboard LCM's and the men in LCA's transported out into the harbor where they were loaded and embarked onto the HMS Princess Maud, a channel steamer, and LST's. The next few days were spent in receiving regulations aboard ship, briefing, practicing battle stations, preparing explosives, practice debarkation, and briefing on the latest intelligence reports, received 3 June 1944, concerning the beaches.

On 4 June 1944 D Day was set and H Hour fixed at 0610 5 June 1944. Later the operation was postponed for 24 hours. Finally at 1930 5 June 1944 everyone was sent to bed and the following is an hourly account of D Day:

D-DAY 6 JUNE 1944

- 0030 Everyone aboard ship awakened.
- 0100 Breakfast was served to all personnel.

- 0200 Men and equipment made ready for the operation.
- 0230 Debarkation from the Princess Maud into LCM's began.
- 0610 Debarkation completed.
- 0633 Eight assault teams of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion landed on Omaha Beach (Easy Red, Fox Green, Fox Red) with the mission of clearing eight 50-yard gaps in the underwater obstacles. (The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was the only Engineer unit to land on both beaches D-Day. Companies A and C and Headquarters and Service Company on Omaha and Company B on Utah Beach. Some of our men actually landed before any other American troops had set foot on the beach.)
- 0715 Support boats landed. However, the Infantry was pinned down and unable to pass the dune line. By this time, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion had blown five of the eight gaps. The beach was under heavy, deadly mortar and artillery fire.
- 0900 Two missing assault teams of the organization were located.
- 1000 The Infantry eliminated the beach defenses and cleared the beach.
- 1030 Battalion Command Post moved to a hillside overlooking Omaha Beach in the vicinity of Colleville-sur-Mer, France.
- 1200 The Beach was still under heavy artillery and mortar fire.
- 1430 Battalion teams working to clear the beach of obstacles.
- 2300 Attacked by enemy aircraft and the bivouac area strafed.

The next day, 7 June 1944, the beach was still under heavy artillery and mortar fire. All the assault and support teams were located and it was found that our casualties were high. Approximately one-third of the total battalion was either killed, missing, or wounded. Meanwhile, work continued in cleaning up the beaches.

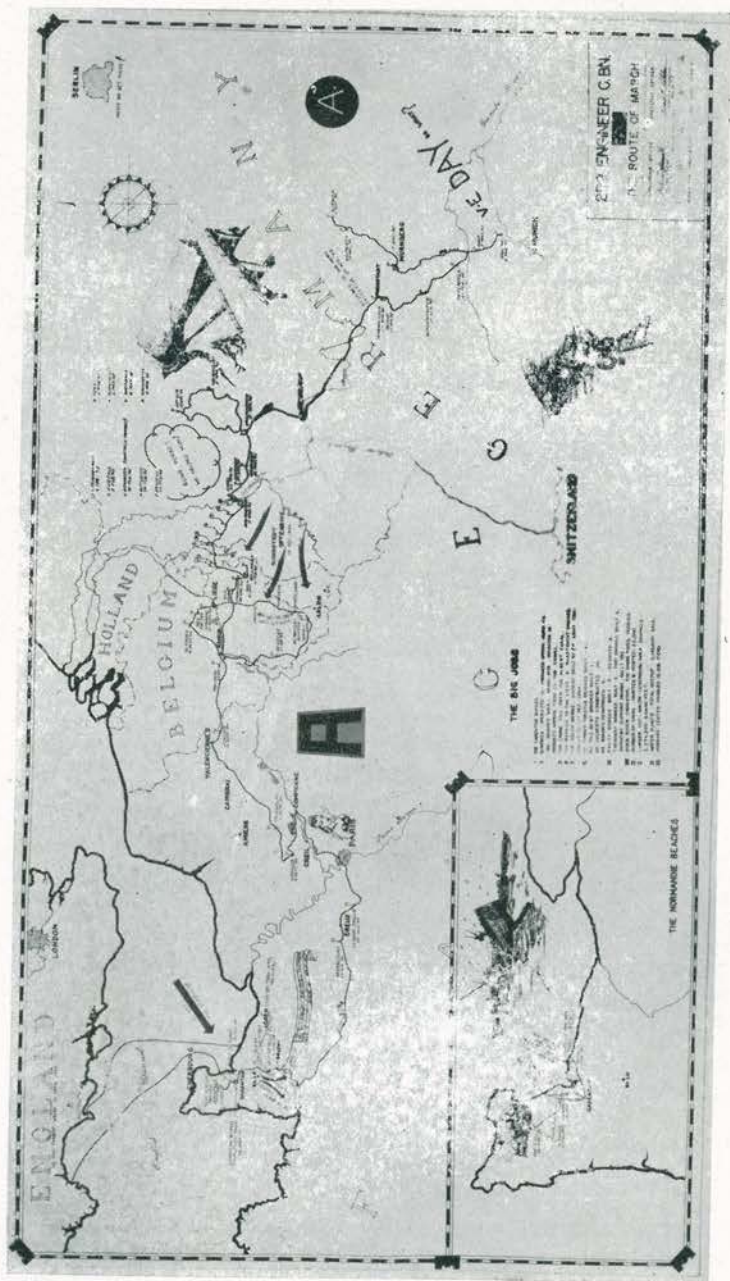
In the early hours of 8 June 1944, the beach was again attacked by



D.-Day



CARENTAN



enemy aircraft which bombed and strafed. However, the anti-aircraft batteries had been set up and literally laid down a protective curtain of anti-aircraft fire over the beach area. As a result of this, the enemy bombings and strafings were haphazard and ineffective. The Battalion continued clearing the beaches, although mortar and artillery fire continued to rain down on Omaha Beach. By evening this shelling had ceased and there was no enemy action in the Beach area that night. We had secured the bridgehead and pushed the enemy out of range of the beaches.

Shortly after midnight enemy aircraft came over the beach area but no bombs were dropped. Our men were so exhausted from overwork and lack of food that they slept undisturbed. On the afternoon of 9 June 1944, all attached personnel were relieved and returned to their organizations. By 2300, the beach was cleared of all standing obstacles and the Battalion was attached to the 336th Engineers of the 5th Engineer Special Brigade.

The afternoon of 10 June, having completed our work on the beaches, the Battalion moved by foot from the beaches to a small village of La Vallee, France. The men bivouacked in an orchard and were given one day's rest. Late in the night the enemy aircraft, now known as "Bedcheck Charlie," made its usual rounds of the beachhead. The following day was a rest period.

For the heroic work done by the Battalion on the beaches, the War Department awarded us the Presidential Unit Citation. The Citation describes in small detail the mission accomplished by the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion. It reads:

"The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, as part of a special engineer demolition task force, was attached to the 1st U. S. Infantry Division for the assault, with the mission of clearing the beach obstacles within the tidal range of the beach from vicinity of Vierville-sur-Mer to Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France. The battalion was organized into eight assault demolition teams, four support demolition teams, and a command. Each demolition team was landed in an LCM at 0633, 6 June 1944, and was equipped with a ton of explosives and accessories, all of which were hand-carried. Due to the rising tide it was necessary to execute the demolition of the outer (seaward) obstacles within 30 minutes after landing. The battalion was equipped with tank dozers, sixty per cent of which did not reach the beach in operating condition. The demolition teams

worked from 0633 to approximately 1330 under extremely heavy enemy fire (both artillery and small-arms), and continued to work under intermittent artillery and small-arms fire until approximately 1600, 7 June 1944. The operation was further complicated because the infantry and other troops were within the danger radius of obstacle demolition. The battalion worked with little food or rest until 9 June 1944, suffering approximately thirty-three per cent casualties. It was necessary, in at least four instances, for teams to interrupt their work and attack enemy sniper positions in the hills. The mission of the battalion was completed under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions, which required extraordinary heroism and determination on the part of each individual. The esprit de corps of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion exhibited in this action is worthy of the highest praise."

12 June 1944, the Battalion was assigned the mission of clearing minefields. Here minefields were found to contain German concrete mines, box mines, and "S" mines. This work continued thru 16 June 1944, during which period one enlisted man was killed and eight others wounded because of exploding anti-personnel mines. Each night "Bed-check Charlie" would make his usual rounds.

On 17 June 1944, the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Carentan, France. Here, we were attached to the 1110th Engineer Combat Group and further attached to the 207th Engineer Combat Battalion. During the next few days, Company B salvaged lumber from the timber bridge near Carentan and Company A prepared five bridges for demolition and provided security for them. The enemy was shelling the vicinity of Carentan.

At noon on 20 June 1944, Company B began construction of a fixed bridge to replace the existing Treadway bridge. Eight hours later at 2030 the enemy shelled and destroyed the Treadway bridge and Company C was called in to remove it. Work of this nature continued until 30 June 1944, at which time the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Orglandes, France.

Meanwhile, on 30 June 1944, the rear echelon moved from Painswick Manor to Camp D-12 near Dorchester. Here work was started immediately after arrival involving the waterproofing of all vehicles and final administrative and supply arrangement. In the pouring rain, all available hands were mixing and kneading the hard waterproofing material and other hands applying it where needed.

2 July 1944, the rear echelon moved from Camp D-12 to Portland Harbor and shortly after noon boarded the waiting LST's. The air was filled with a fine misty rain which lasted until nightfall. The following day, 3 July 1944, the convoy moved along the Normandy coastline which showed clearly in the morning sunlight. Part of the rear echelon debarked late in the afternoon and rolled to the assembly area where most of the waterproofing material was removed. As night fell and the convoy moved thru bombgutted countryside, the sky seemed to glow occasionally from blasting artillery and tracer bullets leaped into the sky, like rockets. Everything was so quiet, not a sound could be heard other than the echoes the craters and hedgrows threw back at the passing vehicles. Field after field was chewed to bits with bombs and shells from naval batteries. Gliders were evcrywhere and now and then a wrecked C-47, paratroop transport, lay like a broken, crushed bird.

Shortly after midnight, the convoy came to a halt and the familiar voice of the guard was recognized. The Battalion was together again. After the greetings and joyous handshakes officers and men retired, rolling out their blankets under the apple trees in the orchard. The last thing heard before falling asleep was the earshattering, earthtrembling roar of a 240 mm cannon.

During the days that followed, the Battalion was busily engaged in receiving reinforcements and maintaining roads, operating gravel pits, water points, and quarries. "Bedcheck Charlie" paid his nightly visits.

On 16 July 1944, the Battalion moved from Orlandes to Ste. Come-du-Mont near Carentan, France. Company C then moved to the vicinity of Liesville, France where it was engaged in the operation of a large quarry. A by-pass was constructed around Carentan, the city being hardly more than a pile of rubble. While the Battalion was bivouaced here the gigantic allied saturation bombing of 10 square miles near St. Lo took place. All morning the sky was darkened with swarms of Flying Fortresses; Mitchell, Havoc, Maurauder, and other medium bombers; Thunderbolts, Mustangs and P-38 Lightnings. The air was filled with a steady, unceasing rumble and the sky to the south was blackened with dust and smoke.

Thus ended the Normandy Campaign. The 299th Engineer Combat



QUARRY OPERATION AT LIESVILLE, FRANCE

Battalion contributed a great deal to make it the world's greatest military campaign to that date.

With the St. Lo breakthrough came a series of rapid moves for the Battalion. On 1st August, 1944, we moved to a bivouac area at Cerisy la Forêt, near St. Lo. While bivouaced here several awards were given out for actions on D-Day. On 6th August 1944 the Battalion moved to la Chapelle du Fest, near Torigni sur Vire. One of the principal jobs accomplished by the Battalion at this time was the traffic circle in Torigni sur Vire, France. Also, while bivouaced in that vicinity the Battalion Special Service Officer, Lt. Elmer W. Kirchenwitz, performed a spectacular feat by presenting Dinah Shore. Dinah sang several of her most popular songs, sang request numbers, signed autographs and permitted the men to take as many photos of her as they desired. The only audience was the Officers and enlisted men of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion

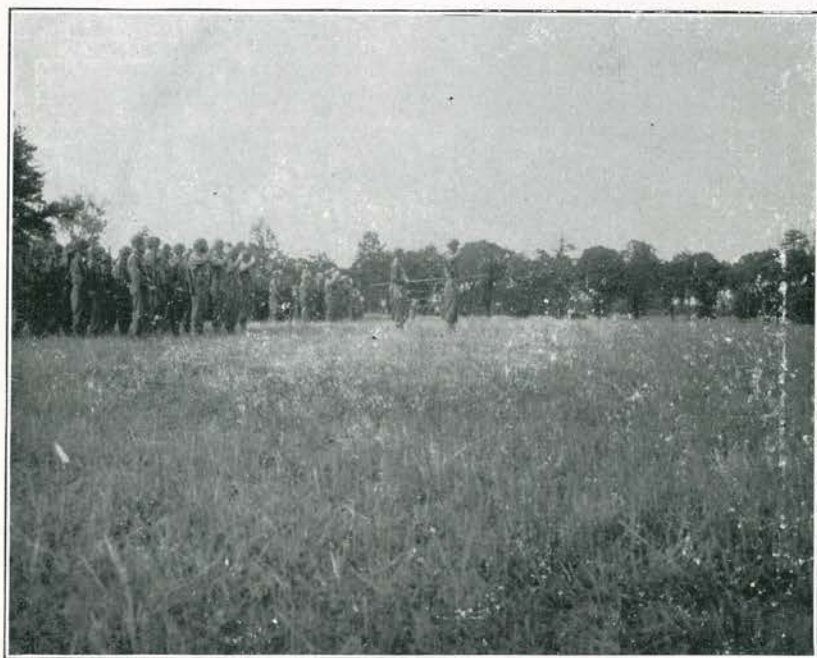


CARENTAN BY-PASS

On 17 August 1944, we moved from La Chapelle to St. Martin le Tallevend near Vire, France. Our Battalion area embraced a network of Army roads which it was our responsibility to maintain.

21 August 1944, the Battalion moved in convoy order from St. Martin to St. Pois, France. From our bivouac area, the church of Avranches could be seen and few men of the Battalion took time to view the beautiful Mont St. Michel towering serenely as it has for centuries from the sea. While bivouaced at St. Pois, Paris was liberated and the Battalion indulged in a victory celebration by enjoying some of the French wines, calvados and cognac.

The battle front had practically become nonexistent during the latter part of August 1944. Our Battalion made one of its longest moves during that period. The night of 25 August 1944 all vehicles were lined up in convoy order by 1900. We waited, lounging all over the vehicles, for



BATTALION FORMATION CERISY LA FORET, FRANCE

movement orders to arrive from Group Headquarters. Finally, as the last red rays of the sun were disappearing over the hillsides, the orders arrived. We moved onto the roadway and joined the long convoys of vehicles, all trying to keep up with the rapidly changing battlelines. The Falaise-Argentan Gap had been closed and our convoy snaked its way thru the bombed out streets of Argentan. At 0100 a German plane was heard overhead and the convoy halted and all blackout lights were snapped off. Soon the plane's drone of motors vanished and we continued on our way. The following day we arrived at our new bivouac area near Brezolles at a place known as Hevercourt. Here the Battalion maintained roads, repaired them, removed wrecked German vehicles, and posted route signs.

30 August 1944, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was on the



TRAFFIC CIRCLE AT TORIGNI, FRANCE

road again. The new bivouac area was Le Gros Taillis near Drieux, France. Our road work continued at a fast pace; filling craters, removing German road signs, clearing mines from road shoulders, and patrolling roads.

Four days later, 3 September 1944, the Battalion again packed up and moved out. This movement was the most enjoyable of all as our convoy route carried us thru Versailles and Paris. What a welcome we received as we passed thru! The city had been completely liberated only a week before. One can never forget the vivacious mademoiselles waving and throwing kisses at us. We continued northward and towards dusk reached the banks of the Oise River. However, there was a minor drawback—no bridge. We followed the Oise River and crossed at Compiègne, arriving at Warluis near Noailles, France, late at night.



LA CHAPELLE-DU-FEST, FRANCE.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JEWETT AND DINAH SHORE

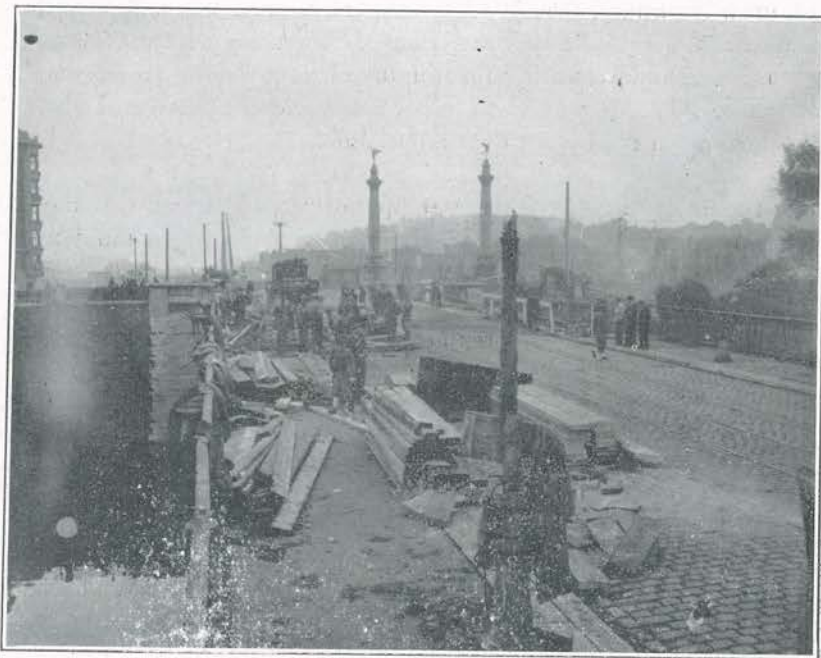
The main hindrance, during the latter part of August and fore part of September 1944, was the lack of gasoline. Our armies had advanced to their limit. Gasoline was being flown in by plane to forward areas and the famous Red Ball Highway was placed in operation. Shortage of gasoline prevented much road work by the Battalion.

On 6 September 1944, the Battalion moved from Warluis to Maig-nely, France near the ex-German communications center of Montdidier. First phase maintenance was performed on the Army net roads in our area. We had just become accustomed to our new area when we moved again. Everyone knew that the more moves we made, the faster the enemy was retreating, so it didn't bother anyone to pack up and unpack his pup tents and other gear. This time, our new area was Jenlain, France, not far from Valenciennes and near the Belgium border. It will be remembered that long columns of German vehicles were strafed and burned by Allied planes during a German attempt to withdraw their forces into Belgium in this area. During the four days the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was bivouaced on Jenlain nearly 100 enemy vehicles were dragged or shoved off the roadway.

The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion crossed the Franco-Belgian border on 14 September 1944 and continued northeastward thru Charle-roi and Namur, to St. Trond, Belgium. A job order was received directing that a 10' x 20' bomb crater hole in the bridge across the Ourthe River (Pont du Fennise) in Liege, Belgium, be repaired. Further, another job order directed that the Pont du Commerce bridge in Liege across the Meuse River be repaired. This was our first opportunity to build and repair bridges. For these jobs Company C was moved to Liege, where the company bivouaced in a park near the downtown section, and within walking distance of the bridges. During this period, Company A moved to Moxhe, Belgium, and constructed a standard bridge on 16 September 1944.

The Northern France Campaign closed on 14 September 1944. This campaign brought about the most rapid retreat known to the German Army; in approximately five weeks the Allied Armies had forced the enemy from the Channel area clear across Northern France and Belgium to his own defenses—the Siegfried line.

A short move from St. Trond to Wihogne, Belgium, was made on 21 September 1944. Wihogne is located about halfway between St. Trond



PONT DU FENNISE BRIDGE, LIEGE, BELGIUM

and Liege, Belgium. We arrived in Wihogne at 0900 hours. Shortly before noon a terrific explosion about 400 yards from the bivouac area sent debris flying high into the air. Windows came crashing down, along with roof shingles and bricks. The site of the explosion was investigated and a large crater with some twisted steel in the bottom of it was found in a barnyard. An old woman was killed, three others injured, and many chickens, two cows, and a donkey were blown to bits. Nearby, other bits of a mechanism were found. Later it was determined that a German vengeance weapon, the buzz bomb V-1, had crashed to the earth there. That was our first experience with buzz bombs. During the following week reports of other bombs falling in the vicinity of Liege were received.

The rainy season was beginning and our pup tents were becoming waterlogged. The ground was soggy from the rain, and the luftwaffe was putting in an appearance every evening.



PONT DU COMMERCE BRIDGE, LIEGE, BELGIUM



CONSTRUCTION OF STANDARD BRIDGE AT MOXHE, BELGIUM



FILL AT CANNE, BELGIUM

German barracks were located outside the village of Hex, Belgium, by our reconnaissance section and, on 4 October 1944, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, less Companies A and B, moved into these barracks. Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters and Service Company was located in the two structures on top of the hill within the camp area. Company C lived in two barracks at the foot of the hill. Road maintenance continued, and roads around the 12th Field Hospital were repaired and gravelled. Meanwhile Companies A and B reinforced bridges and improved roads in the vicinity of Maastricht, Holland, and Canne, Belgium.

While the Battalion Headquarters was stationed at Hex, Belgium, two enlisted men of the reconnaissance section were killed instantly when a mine exploded in their faces. The mine was of the booby-trapped improvised box type.

The month of October brought about a change in the First Army area. By this time First Army was hammering fiercely at the much-boast-



REINFORCED BRIDGES, MAASTRICHT, HOLLAND

ed Siegfried Line. Fierce battles were raging in the Aachen area and at night the eastern sky was aglow as the artillery poured out at the enemy. However, a secret shift was underway and the Ninth Army moved in between the British Second and the American First Armies. The First Army was moved southward. Consequently, on 20 October 1944, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion moved out of Hex, onto a road already crowded with northbound Ninth Army vehicles, and headed south on route N 4.

Route N 4 winds its way thru the Ardennes Mountains. The mountains were once high towering peaks like the Alps, but time and weather have worn them down and today they closely resemble the Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania. The hillsides were covered with gay splashes of autumn colors as we passed thru the small villages and larger cities: Aywaille, Houffalize, Bastogne, Martelange, and Habay. Little did we realize that just two months later this very route would be one of the most bitterly contested battle areas of the war. Our bivouac area was at



HACHY, BELGIUM

Heinstert, near Habay la Neuve, Belgium. The weather was damp and rainy and the air was cold with the chill of winter. Immediate reconnaissance was made to locate billets for the Battalion and on 22 October 1944 Company B moved into Habay la Neuve, Headquarters and Service Company and Company A moved into Hachy along with the Battalion Headquarters. A few days later, Company C moved into Hachy.

Our billets at Hachy were a Catholic School. The officers of the Battalion occupied the front building, and the main building was occupied by Headquarters and Service Company, the offices and part of Company C. The south annex was occupied by Company C and the north annex by Company A. A large courtyard furnished adequate parking areas and space for volleyball courts. A large green pasture was used for football and softball. Message Center was located in a small building near the entrance to the court yard. Between the main building and the officers' quarters was a beautiful patio-like courtyard, with a religious statue in the center. The outlook was very good.



TRESTLE BENT BRIDGE, ARLON

Company B began construction of a trestle bent bridge at Arlon, Belgium, over a double-tracked railroad. When completed, on 18 November 1944, it was the highest bridge built in the European Theater by First Army Troops until that date.

The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion took an active part in the First Army's winterization program. The Battalion took over the operation and production of sawmills in Belgium and Luxembourg, including those in Habay la Neuve, Suxy, Ste. Marie, Koerch, Mersch, Shockville, Ernzen, Athus, Breuvanne, Helanzy, Diekirch, Junglinster, Arlon, Esch and numerous other localities. A typical example of the daily production of these sawmills was on 3 December 1944 at which time 53,594 FBM were produced in a 24-hour period. Lumber stock piles were located in Mersch, Habay la Neuve, Arlon and Stockem.



SAWMILL IN LUXEMBOURG





CHAPTER IV

Rundstedt's Offensive

At 1000 hours, 16 December 1944, Staff Sergeant Eldon W. Walker came into headquarters and informed the Commanding Officer that German artillery had been falling in Diekirch, Luxembourg (where he was supervising the operation of a sawmill) since 0530. The German fire continued throughout the day. Sergeant Walker was ordered to evacuate his men. By this time, shrapnel had cut the power line supplying the sawmill and one enemy shell had landed in the gateway to the sawmill. During evacuation enemy aircraft was seen over the town. No personnel of the Battalion was injured.

On 17 December 1944, all observation posts were manned in accordance with a security plan previously drawn up. Sawmill operation forward of the Corps rear boundary was stopped. All equipment and men forward of this line returned to the Battalion Headquarters. Another Engineer Combat Battalion was manning a barrier line east of Bastogne running in a north-south direction from Wiltz to Aselborn. The enemy had broken thru the front line in the vicinity of Clervaux and was heading in the direction of Bastogne. Enemy paratroopers were reported to have landed in the vicinity of Wiltz. Later reports stated enemy tanks were in Wiltz, Luxembourg.

A strong enemy attack was made in the vicinity of Bastogne and Martelange, Belgium, on 18 December 1944, VIII Corps and First Army Headquarters were evacuating Bastogne.

At 1825 hours that evening, Company B of our Battalion moved out to take up the construction and defense of a barrier line running northwest from Martelange along Route N 46 to N 15 out of Bastogne. Shortly after midnight notice arrived that the Company B CP was located at Witry, Belgium. Company A moved out. At 1415 hours the afternoon of 19 December 1944, a messenger informed Headquarters that the Company A CP was located at La Vacherie.

Both Companies A and B were to occupy a barrier line extending northwest from Martelange to La Roche, in conjunction with the 1278th and 158th Engineer Combat Battalions. Company A began work immediately on their barrier line. First priority was given to the Bailey Bridge on N 4 in the vicinity of Ortheuville, and other bridges nearby. It had been reported that enemy tanks were in that vicinity. At 1810, enemy tank and small arms fire was reported near Bastogne. Shell fire was also reported falling in Bastogne.

At 1500 hours 19 December 1944, Company C moved out. Its mission was to remain in support of Companies A and B. The Company C CP was located at Vaux.

Company A completed the preparations for demolition of six bridges in their sector at 2029 hours. The southern portion of their sector had been taken over by elements of the 1278th Engineer Combat Battalion. A patrol sent out from Company A to prepare a bridge for demolition met an enemy armored column of fourteen vehicles advancing. They engaged the enemy, possibly knocking out one tank. The patrol abandoned two trucks and the men scattered into the woods when capture was imminent. The patrol leader returned to the Company CP alone at 0145 hours, 20 December 1944. Enemy action, early 20th of December 1944, along the northwest end of Company A's barrier line caused them to blow all bridges except the Bailey Bridge on N 4. Security of the Bailey Bridge was reinforced by eight American tank destroyers.

Company A was relieved at daylight of all blocks north of Route N 26 by elements of the 158th Engineer Combat Battalion and all blocks

south of N 26 and N 15 by Company C 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, who had been in reserve at Vaux. Company C moved to Morhet, opening their CP at 1600 hours 20 December 1944. Due to enemy action, the second platoon of Company A was not relieved by elements of the 153th Engineer Combat Battalion.

The enemy attacked the Bailey Bridge at 0930 hours, 20 December 1944. In the ensuing battle, the American tank destroyers knocked out an enemy tank on the end of the bridge, thus making it an effective obstacle. A counter-attack by the 153th Engineer Combat Battalion with elements of Company A, 299th Engineer Combat Battalion attacked, secured the bridge, destroyed an enemy armored vehicle, and pushed the enemy back, opening route N 4 to Bastogne. The second platoon of Company C, 299th Engineer Combat Battalion arrived and relieved the second platoon of Company A on the Bailey Bridge about noon. Company A, less two squads still missing in action, assembled at the Battalion CP at Hachy and went into reserve.

On the evening of the 19th of December 1944, the Battalion submitted plans to the 1128th Engineer Combat Group Headquarters for a barrier line from Martelange southeast to Arlon, and east of N 4, a frontage of about fifteen miles. The task of preparing and manning the barrier was given to elements of the 341st Engineer General Service Regiment at Arlon, who had come under the control of the 1128th Engineer Combat Group. The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was to supervise the barrier and coordinate it with their barrier line to the north. The executive officer was sent out at noon to check the barrier. He returned about 1800 hours with information that the barrier line was weak, due to possible by-passes and fording of streams. He also reported that a pitched battle was in progress just north of Martelange at 1500 hours. This report was confirmed by reports from Company B that they had destroyed two bridges in Martelange at 1720 hours and that enemy tanks and infantry had moved into the town, under the protection of heavy gun fire. All barriers in the vicinity of Martelange were soon blown, and all personnel, not already cut off by the enemy, returned to the Company CP at Witry. Company B was ordered to stand by at Witry as long as possible.

At 1745 hours on the afternoon of 20 December 1944, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion received orders to retake the town of

Martelange. Martelange is located in a deep valley between wooded mountains. A creek flows thru this valley, and highway N 4 runs north and south thru the town.

A task force was organized into two sections, one under the leadership of Captain Ambrose L. Manion and the other under Lieutenant Harold R. Jenkins. Captain Manion's force was to attack the town from the west and Lieutenant Jenkins' from the south. At 2000 hours 20 December 1944, Major Kohler, the Battalion executive officer, arrived at the Company B CP at Witry and found that the task force under Captain Manion had not yet assembled. At 2330 Captain Manion arrived, and a short time later the task force was organized. Major Kohler was in charge of coordinating the two attacks. At 0112 hours 21 December 1944, the force under Captain Manion moved out, established a defensive position on the outskirts of the town, and sent patrols into the town to obtain strength and disposition of the enemy. The town was not to be attacked before dawn.

Lieutenant Jenkins' force, moving up from the south, stopped at the outskirts of the town and sent night patrols into the town. This they accomplished very successfully, obtaining strength and disposition of the enemy. They did not attack.

Contact was made with elements of the 552nd Engineer Heavy Ponton Company which was along N 45 in the vicinity of Trainment. The 552nd Engineer Heavy Ponton Company had a barrier line from Trainment northwest to N 15, and agreed to stand by their barriers as long as elements of the task force were forward of them. Close communication was maintained between the task force CP at Witry and the Ponton Company. Meanwhile, Captain Manion planned to attack Martelange at dawn, and a patrol had been sent out to contact Lieutenant Jenkins' force. Food, medical supplies, and a radio set with operators from the 1278th Engineer Combat Battalion were sent forward with an officer from that organization. Contact was made only twice with these men. All personnel sent forward at that time were later reported missing in action. It was later confirmed that these men never reached the Witry CP.

Company C was ordered out of their barrier line on the afternoon of 20 December 1944 by officers of the 28th Division who occupied that area. The division did not want any barriers constructed in front of them that

would hinder their advance. Company C, less the second platoon, assembled at the Company CP at Morhet and turned in for a rest. About 0200 hours 21 December 1944 Company C was ordered to reinforce the task force at Witry with **all available men.**

Enroute to the task force CP at Witry Company C's convoy was cut by enemy action during the night. A platoon officer and one squad was dispatched to pick up stragglers. The second platoon of Company C was attached to the 158th Engineer Combat Battalion, and was guarding the Bailey Bridge on N 4 at Ortheuville. They remained there until ordered to evacuate. This second platoon of Company C, with elements of the 158th Engineer Combat Battalion, fought off several enemy attacks, putting one enemy machine gun out of action. A company officer was sent back to contact them.

Lieutenant Robert J. Russell of Company B reported in to Battalion CP at Hachy with four enemy paratroopers that had been captured in the vicinity of a road block at Remeville, about 0800 hours. Lieutenant Russell was given the mission of blowing all obstacles along routes N 46 and 15, and fighting delaying action. He departed from the CP about 0900 hours to locate his men for the job. Upon the approach of German infantry tanks, he blew the craters at the road junction of routes N 15 and N 46. His men stopped one tank with a bazooka, and killed at least six of the German Infantry with rifle fire.

Lieutenant Russell then ordered his men to withdraw to Rosiere le Petit, where they were attached to the 28th Division, defending the town. On 21 December 1944, his men participated in repulsing a German tank and infantry attack. They were again attacked by infantry and tanks at 1800 hours the same day. At 2030 hours, the division issued orders to withdraw to Neufchateau.

The platoon, having lost eight men, reorganized and was attached to the 110th Infantry and did engineer work with the division engineers for three days. At 1500 hours 25 December 1944, all men were detached from the 28th Division and proceeded back to the battalion CP which was now at Malonne near Namur, Belgium, arriving there at 1930 hours.

A report was received at 0930 hours 21 December 1944, that there were enemy paratroopers at Fauvillers cutting the task force off at

Martelange. Captain William J. Bunting and elements of Company C, 299th Engineer Combat Battalion then present at the Battalion CP in Hachy were sent forward to break thru to the task force at Martelange and keep the road open. Company C engaged the enemy at 1005 hours, cleaned out a town, killed at least two, and took four prisoners. Company C continued its advance toward Martelange. About one half mile outside of Fauvillers the enemy pinned them down with heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The advance party had been cut off. When the enemy began to close in on the flanks of Company C, the company withdrew to the road junction of N 45 and 46 at which place they reinforced the road block with half a squad; the remainder returned to the task force CP at Witry.

Orders had already reached the CP at Witry to evacuate and return to the Battalion CP at Hachy. A message was sent to the Battalion CP informing them that the task force had been cut off in Martelange and that armored vehicles were needed to break thru and get them out. Meanwhile, an officer of the 552nd Engineer Heavy Ponton Company had come forward to the CP to check on the situation and stated that all was secure behind us and that he had gotten two tank destroyers to support his road blocks. Captain Bunting was sent back to try and get the two tank destroyers to support his company, which now amounted to two platoons, in the attack on Martelange to break thru and get the task force out. The tank destroyers refused to assist without orders from their headquarters. Major Kohler ordered everyone to withdraw and return to their respective CP's. The convoy was assembled and a patrol was sent back to pick up the rear guard. In addition to picking up the rear guard, they picked up the First Sergeant of Company C and two men who had been cut off just east of Fauvillers, along with two other men who had escaped. The two men who escaped reported that they had been surrounded that morning, 21 December 1944, about daylight, and all of the vehicles had been captured before they could destroy them. The remnants of the task force left Witry at 1420 hours. At 1100 hours, 21 December 1944, the Battalion received word to assemble all personnel and proceed to St. Cecil.

Company A had moved out and relieved the task force under Lieutenant Jenkins at 0600 hours, 21 December 1944. They took up defensive positions at a road block just south of Martelange on route N 4 and remained there until word was received to disengage and return to the Battalion CP at Hachy. They returned to the Battalion CP at 1500 hours. The executive officer, with remnants of Company B and Company C, ar-

rived about the same time. The squads of Company B had returned, and Lieutenant Russell and 19 enlisted men were still fighting in the vicinity of their road blocks.

The Battalion departed from Hachy at 1630 hours, arriving at St. Cecil at 2030 hours, where the battalion was billeted in two hotels. Major Edwin R. Perry remained at Hachy to pick up stragglers, and later went to Neufchateau to get Lieutenant Russell and his men released.

The Battalion left St. Cecil at 1030 hours on the morning of 22 December 1944 and arrived at Malonne, Belgium at 1600 hours. Lieutenant Vernon L. French arrived at the Battalion CP at Malonne at 1830 hours 24 December 1944 after having been picked up by elements of the 4th Armored Division entering Fauvillers on 22 December. At 1930 hours 25 December 1944 Major Perry arrived, with Lieutenant Russell and 19 enlisted men.

Captain Steen arrived at the CP in Malonne about 2000 hours 25 December 1944 with Lieutenants Donahoo and Seibert. The survivors of Captain Steen's task force had been taken prisoner at Martelange on 21 December 1944 and evacuated to Bigonville. The Captain was liberated when elements of the 4th Armored Division retook Bigonville, on the 24th of December.

A check of the Battalion on 26 December 1944 revealed the 41 men missing in action and two others known to have been wounded.

Christmas 1944 was not a very happy one for the Battalion. 24 December, Christmas Eve, an air raid occurred and the lights throughout the buildings we occupied went out. Many of us were still jittery from our recent experiences and this did not help the situation. During the week we spent in Malonne, movies were shown and the men of the battalion were given time to rest up. An inventory showed that we had lost 17 vehicles due to enemy action. Our casualties now totaled 188.

Our rest period ended 28 December 1944 when we were relieved of attachment to the 1128th Engineer Combat Group and attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps. On that day we moved out of Malonne enroute to our destination, Spa, Belgium, which was on the northern flank of the German bulge. We arrived at Spa late in the afternoon. Companies A, B and C were billeted in various chateaus in town. Headquarters and Ser-

vice Company and Headquarters occupied two large chateaus on the outskirts of the town. The wintry days were icy cold and it was difficult to heat the buildings.

One of the first jobs taken over by the Battalion was the guarding of seventeen bridges in the vicinity of Spa. This was later increased to twenty-five. The first night we spent in Spa was disturbed by a heavy, throbbing, rumbling noise like a huge bus lacking a muffler. This continued at ten minute intervals during the night. They were buzz bombs! Many of them barely cleared the tops of the hills about us. Some came over so low that their outline and blast could be seen thru the heavy snow-fall. As soon as the sound of one died away, the rumble and sputtering of another could be heard approaching. Then the inevitable happened.

It was almost 1100 hours on the morning of 30 December. A flying bomb zoomed thru the wintry sky and down "alley number five" as the men in Company C called it. First Sergeant Mitchell and Staff Sergeant Walker were standing outside their billets when Sergeant Walker looked up into the sky and shouted, pointing to the bomb, "Look, Mitch, it's doing tricks!" Sergeant Mitchell took a quick glance and fell flat on the ground. The buzz bomb, whose motor had ceased to run, nosed up into the air, then dived to the earth. The shattering explosion wrecked the billets of Companies B and C. It blew windows and doors out, complete with their frames. The roofs were knocked off and plaster lay on the floors throughout the buildings. The bomb had fallen just up the hill from the two companies. The concussion of its explosion was so great that many windows in Headquarters nearly a mile away were shattered. Twenty-six men of the Battalion were injured; none seriously, however.

While the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was stationed in Spa, Belgium, awards were made for gallantry in action during the initial stages of the **Bulge**.

During this period, the ground was covered with wet, icy snow which drifted and swirled about the hills. The men were out on the roads covering slippery places and hills with cinders to prevent accidents. Meanwhile, our equipment was being rebuilt to T|O strength and we were able to accomplish more road work. Plowing roads, removing wrecked vehicles, and posting signs were added to our engineer duties.



AWARDING BRONZE STARS

SPA, BELGIUM

While stationed in Spa, we were given the mission of supporting the Seventh Armored Division. On 15 January 1945, we began hauling parts of a Bailey Bridge to Malmedy, Belgium. The next few days we removed mines from road shoulders and swept the road surfaces for mines. On 21 January 1945, Battalion headquarters was at Walk. Headquarters and Service Company remained in Spa, Company A was at Waimes, Company B in Malmedy, and Company C in Boussire. The bivouac areas of Companies A and C and Battalion Headquarters were in the vicinity of Malmedy. The following day, 22 January 1945, Headquarters and Service Company moved to Walk. Also on that day the Battalion was relieved of attachment to the 1186th Engineer Combat Group, and attached to the 1153rd Engineer Combat Group. About 1000 hours on the morning of



LT. COLONEL JEWETT AWARDS PURPLE HEARTS AT WALK, BELGIUM

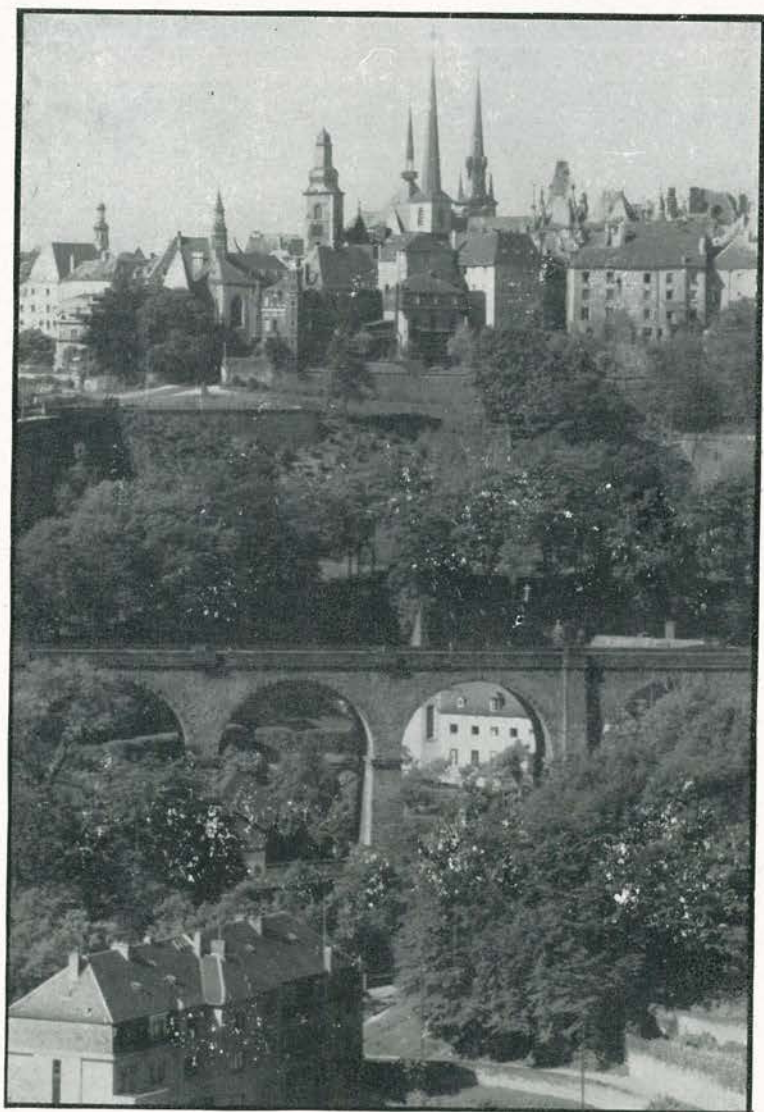
25 January 1945 a terrific explosion rocked the tiny village of Walk, Belgium, and the only church in the vicinity crumbled to the ground in ruins. The German vengeance weapon, a flying bomb, had drifted in from the southeast. Its body swept over the roof of the medical building, knocking snow off the roof, and as it glided towards the ground, sheared off a telephone pole, and crashed sideways into the wall of the church. Two men of the Battalion were wounded.

The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was with the Seventh Armored Division when the town of St. Vith was liberated again. It looked like a ghost town—wreckage everywhere. The roads around the town were heavily mined. Men of the Battalion swept the roads and shoulders with mine detectors before the snowplows could clear the roads. By the first of February 1945, the German bulge had been wiped out.



ST. VITH, BELGIUM





LUXEMBURG



CHAPTER V

Roer and Rhine

On 6 February 1945 the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion moved under cover of darkness and secret orders to Lichtenbusch, Germany. Lichtenbusch was a small village just inside the German border and in the first defense of the Ziegfried line. Dragons teeth, tank traps, and pill boxes were scattered over the fields. Also, at this time the Battalion was relieved of attachment to the 1153rd Engineer Combat Group and attached to the 1111th Engineer Combat Group. The heavy snows had ceased. Most of the ground had started to thaw. Heavy rains made the mud knee deep and a major problem to the huge, heavy convoys moving up for a showdown on the Roer.

We marked time until 11 February 1945, when we moved from Lichtenbusch to Zweifall, Germany. At Zweifall, we were relieved from the XVIII Airborne Corps and attached to III Corps. During the waiting period, our work consisted mainly of digging drain drains and removing mud from the roads. One platoon was taking Treadway Bridge training. On 15 February the Battalion was relieved from 1111th Engineer Combat Group and attached to the 1159th Engineer Combat Group. Three days later, 18 February, we moved out of Zweifall into the Hurtgen Forest.



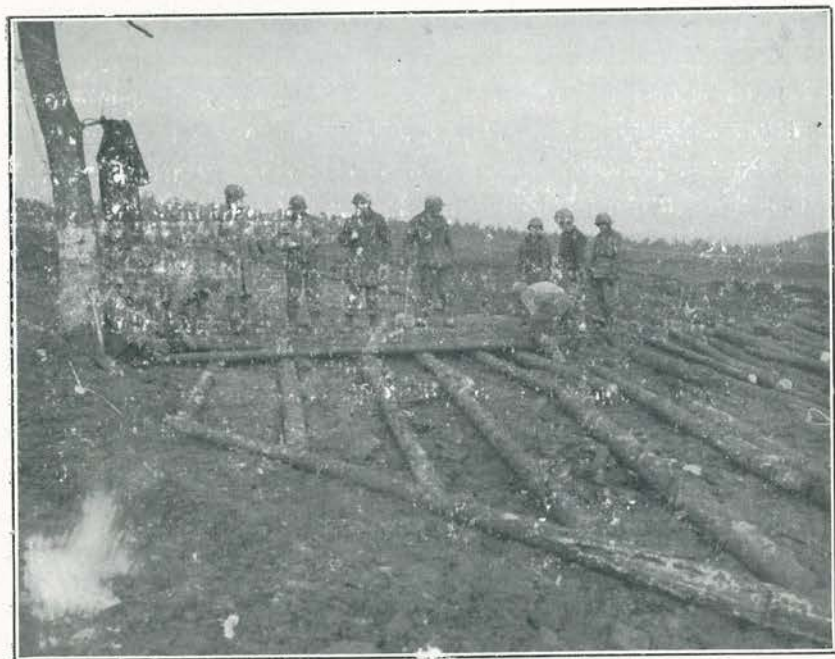
SWEEPING FOR MINES, ST. VITH

Here the men constructed huts and log cabins from ration boxes and logs. The rain made the dirt roads nearly impassable. However, to counteract this, a corduroy road was under construction near Hurtgen, Germany.

By 20 February 1945, the battalion had personnel from the 23rd Armored Infantry, 629th Engineer Light Equipment Company, 460th Amphibious Truck Company, 284th Engineer Combat Battalion, and the 72nd Engineer Combat Battalion attached for duty and preparations were made for the Roer Assault. The dams holding back the river had been demolished by the retreating German troops and the flooded waters of the Roer were beginning to recede. Daily checks of the depth of the water were made. Plans were being formulated. On 23 February the date and time of assault was set at 0500 hours on 25 February 1945. The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was to build infantry foot and support bridges for the 16th Infantry Regiment of the First Infantry Division. All the necessary equipment for the construction of these bridges had been moved into a factory on the western bank of the Roer.



CLEARING SNOW FROM ROADS, ST. VITH



CONSTRUCTING CORDUROY ROAD NEAR HURTGEN, GERMANY



INFANTRY SUPPORT BRIDGE ACROSS ROER RIVER

During the night of 24 February, a terrific artillery barrage blasted the entire east bank of the Roer. Our men waited during the night for the word to go. North of us at Duren the 28th Infantry was having difficulty crossing the river; only one foot bridge was in at 0400 hours 25 February. At 1430 hours that afternoon word was received postponing the operation for 24 hours.

At noon on the 25th of February, Major Kohler sent word that five American tanks were in the town on the east bank of the river. There was intermittent small arms fire. Major Kohler held up the construction of the bridges until the infantry cleared the area of small arms fire. By 1440 hours, the infantry foot bridge was completed and construction of the infantry support bridge began. At 1600 hours, the second infantry foot bridge was completed. At 1820 hours, Company C of the First Battalion, 16th Infantry crossed the Roer.

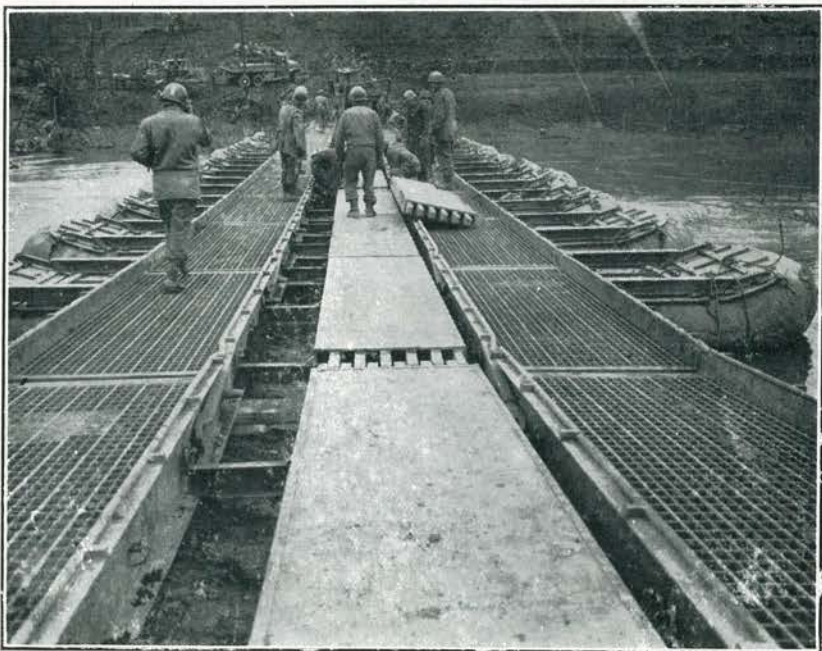


INFANTRY FOOT BRIDGE ACROSS ROER RIVER

On 26 February 1945, the Battalion CP was located at Kresau, Germany, on the western bank of the Roer River. German artillery shells were still coming over, but caused no damage. A treadway bridge was built by Company B at Ludingen. The bridgehead over the Roer was secured, and the Battle of the Rhineland began.

Company A was attached to the 14th Cavalry Reconnaissance Group on 27 February. During the days that followed, the company took an active part in reconnaissance work and the capture of Poll, Ahren, Bodorf, Tripplendorf, and Sachtem.

The Battalion was attached to the Ninth Armored Division on 28 February 1945, for the push to the Rhine and the Remagen bridgehead. As the campaign opened, the Battalion was maintaining roads, sweeping for mines, and maintaining and guarding bridges. Company B was given the mission of closely following behind CCA, and Company C was to fol-



TREADWAY BRIDGE ACROSS THE ROER RIVER

low CCB, Ninth Armored Division. The company commanders of Companies B and C were given orders to replace all treadway bridges with culverts or Bailey Bridges. This was done as soon as possible, since treadway bridge was a critical item.

On 1 March 1945, Company C built two culverts and a seventy-foot DS Bailey Bridge at Disernich, Germany, to replace three treadway bridges placed by the Ninth Armored Division Engineers that day.

On 4 March 1945, the Battalion CP moved to Geich, and Company B built a culvert at Wollersheim, replacing a treadway bridge built by the Ninth Armored Engineers. Road maintenance continued—clearing debris from principal roads, sweeping road shoulders and ditches, and filling craters. Our bulldozers went to work digging gun positions for the 18th Cavalry Squadron near Weissershem.



CP AT KREUSAU, GERMANY

On 6 March 1945 the Battalion CP, Headquarters and Service Company, and Company C moved to a radio station on the outskirts of Euskirchen, Germany. Company B was located in Wichternich, and Company A in Irreshim. We were relieved of attachment to the 1159th Engineer Combat Group, and attached to the 1111th Engineer Combat Group on this date also.

Company B built a 130 foot double-double Bailey Bridge at Enskirchen, across the Erft River, on 7 March. The following morning, 0500 hours, 8 March 1945, the bridge collapsed when crossing tanks failed to maintain proper interval and one tank struck a side panel of the bridge. It was replaced by 1945 hours that evening.

German resistance had been crushed between the Roer and Rhine



BAILEY BRIDGES AT EUSKIRCHEN



REMGAN BRIDGE SHORTLY AFTER COLLAPSE

rivers. The forward Battalion CP moved to Reinbach on the afternoon of 7 March 1945. Elements of the Ninth Armored Division captured the Ludendorf bridge at Remagen. The following day Company B moved to Remagen, Company A moved to Lohrsdorf, near Remagen, and Company C moved to the vicinity of Bad Neunahr. Construction of ferries was begun immediately, under heavy German artillery fire, and frequent bombing and strafing attacks. Company B and Headquarters and Service Company moved to Bad Neuenahr on the 10th and 11th of March. The entire Battalion was billeted in buildings in various parts of the city, except Company A. With the help of the 86th Heavy Ponton Battalion, six ponton ferries were constructed, work on the ferry sites continued, and so did the German artillery fire and Luftwaffe activity. Power boats patrolled the Rhine upstream and down stream, to protect the bridges from possible floating mines and other demolitions. Our men fired at any objects floating near the bridges. Company A moved to Boddendorf, near Remagen. Never before had there been such a concentration of firepower in such a small area. On 10 March 1945, five men of Company C were seriously wounded when a German artillery shell hit near them during construction of a ferry site. Two later died of their wounds.

14 March 1945, a landing site and launching site for Dukw's was constructed by the Battalion for the 78th Infantry Division. Patrolling of the Rhine continued up and downstream from the Remagen Bridge.

On 16 March 1945, Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Company and Company C moved to Oberwinter on the Rhine, a few miles north of Remagen. Company B moved to Kripp, Germany. The following day about 1000 hours 17 March 1945, the world-renowned Ludendorf bridge collapsed into the Rhine.

The Bridge was undergoing repairs at the time and no military traffic was using it. At least two ponton bridges and one floating Bailey Bridge were in use by this time in the bridgehead vicinity. Also several ponton ferries were operating across the Rhine.

On 21 March 1945, the Battalion assumed the guard and maintenance of the Treadway bridge at Remagen. The Battalion also maintained roads, posted signs, and did engineer work as directed. Company A moved into Remagen this date and on 24 March Company B moved to Erpel.



BAILEY BRIDGE NORTH OF REMAGEN



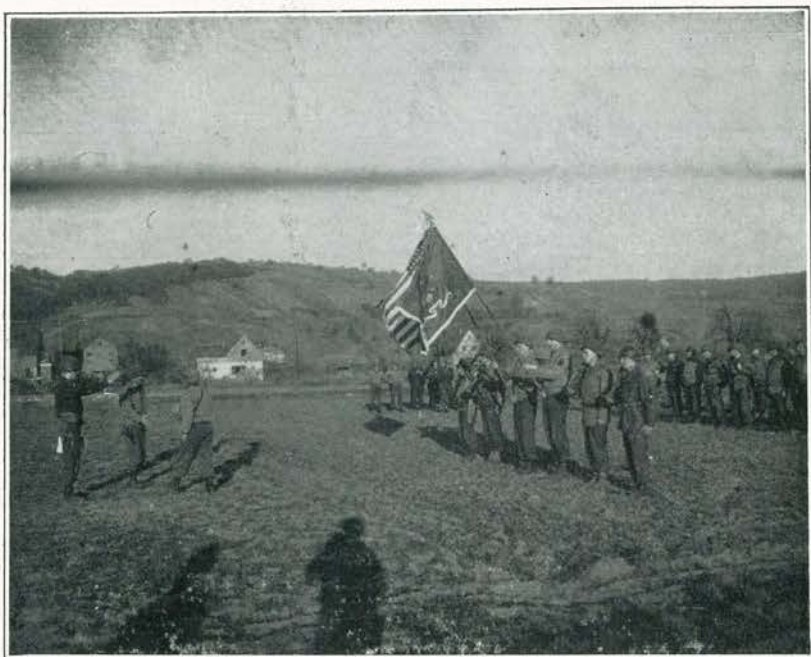
PONTON BRIDGE NEAR HONNEF



299TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION FERRY NEAR REMAGEN

On 24 March 1945, as the sunset cast long shadows over the Rhine valley, a formation was held on the east bank of the river near Unkel, Germany, and the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion officially received the Distinguished Unit Citation (Presidential Unit Citation) as the Corps Engineer tied a long, swallow-tailed blue silk streamer to the Battalion Colors.

On 26 March 1945, the Battalion crossed the Rhine to Unkel, stayed there overnight, and the next day moved into the field along the Reich Autobahn near Ammerich, Germany. Three days later, 30 March 1945, the Battalion moved to Hershbach, where several German soldiers surrendered to an extremely surprised group of men from the Battalion. The last day of this historic month, we moved to the vicinity of Greifenstein.

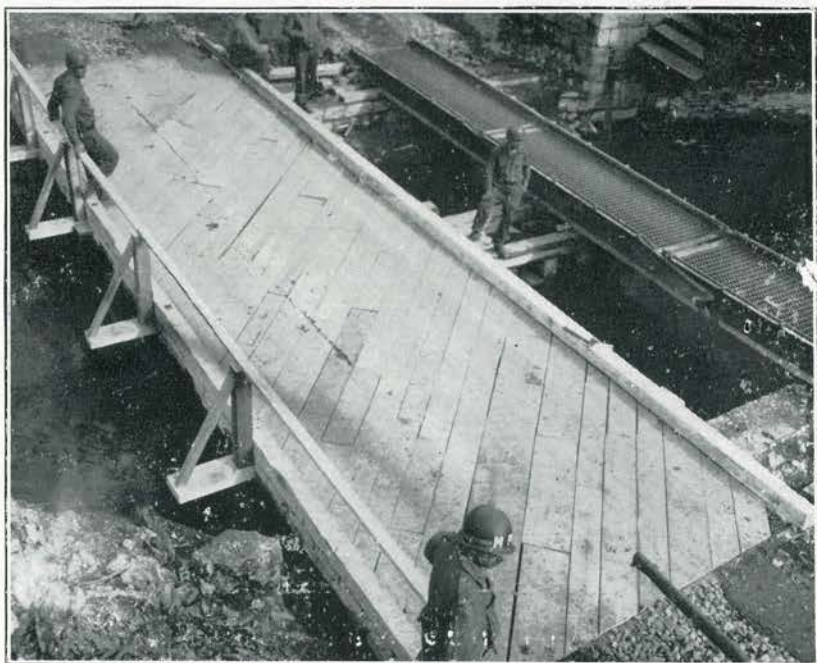


BATTALION RECEIVES CITATION

During the period from 26 to 31 March 1945, the Battalion was relieved of all work on the Rhine, and for the remainder of the month did general engineer work in the III Corps area. The "invincible strength" of the German military might was broken and the big push was on.

Easter Sunday 1 April 1945, the Battalion attended church services in a very old chapel on a mountain top overlooking the countryside. The trees on the hills were cloaked in fine veils of misty green; big fleecy clouds swept across the blue sky; and their shadows raced from hill to hill. It was hard to believe that fierce battles were being waged less than an hour's ride away.

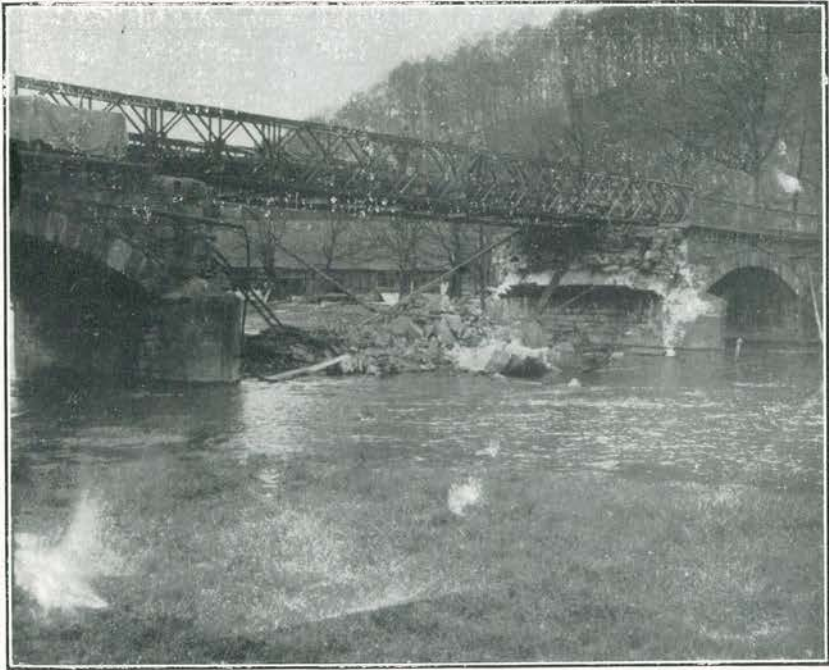
During the period from 1 April to 9 April 1945, the Battalion remained attached to the 1111th Engineer Combat Group, and performed engineer duties in the Corps area. On 5 April 1945, we moved from Griefenstein to Wolkersdorf, north of Giessen, Germany.



THE FIXED BRIDGE AT MESCHEDÉ, GERMANY

Effective 1800 hours on the 9th of April, the Battalion was given the mission of supporting the advance of the Fifth Infantry Division. At that time, the Fifth Infantry Division was moving in a westerly direction against the resisting Ruhr pocket. A quarter of a million German troops were sealed up in the pocket, and they were being constantly pounded by artillery and bombers until they collapsed on 16 April 1945.

Bridging was the major item that the division requested. The 299th Engineer Combat Battalion installed and constructed seven bridges during the period from 9 to 16 April inclusive. Among these were a fixed bridge at Meschede, Germany, and 80-foot double single Bailey bridge constructed at Laer, Germany, an 80-foot Bailey bridge at Freienohl, Germany and a 110-foot triple single Bailey bridge at Oventrop, Germany. In addition to bridge construction, the Battalion maintained the Division's MSR.



BAILEY BRIDGE AT LAER, GERMANY



BAILEY BRIDGE AT FREIENOHL, GERMANY



BAILEY BRIDGE AT OVENTROP, GERMANY

Shortly after the bridge at Arnsberg, Germany was completed, one of the abutments gave way and the bridge collapsed. It was later salvaged and returned to the Engineer dump.

In the early morning of 17 April 1945, all available vehicles were dispatched to the 1159th Engineer Combat Group, and from there proceeded to a forward Prisoner of War Encampment to transport prisoners from the pocket to Brilon. Thirty-four two and a half ton trucks and three weapons carriers were furnished. A representative was sent to contact the officer in charge of the Prisoner of War Encampment in Brilon, to render all available assistance in providing suitable facilities for the enclosure. Tools for digging latrines and tanks for water storage were furnished.



CHAPTER VI

Victory in Europe

On 19 April 1945, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was relieved of assignment to the First United States Army and assigned to the Third United States Army. We had fought clear across Europe with the First Army, but now the First Army's task in the European Theater was completed. It was nearly midnight as the first vehicle of our convoy rolled onto the road with headlights ablaze and we travelled throughout the night and the next day. Late in the evening of 20 April 1945, we arrived at our bivouac area at Herrneuses near Neustadt, Germany. On 23 April, we moved to Neuhof, Germany. Routine engineer work continued in the Corps area. 27 April 1945 found the Battalion in Gunzenhausen, Germany and three days later, on 30 April 1945, we moved to Pietenfeld.

The German army had been crushed, the Russians were in Berlin, and we all knew it would be only a matter of days. On 2 May, the Battalion moved to Dorf, after crossing the Danube River, and the following day, 3 May 1945, we moved to Zolling, north of Munich.

At 0200 hours 8 May 1945, the German Army, Navy, and Air Force surrendered unconditionally to the American, British, and Russian Forces. The evening of 8 May 1945, a C-47 transport flew over our area. As the men watched it, the plane flicked on its pilot lights and small glowing lights of red, green, and white showed on the wingtips and tail.



GERMAN PRISONERS AT FORWARD PWE IN POCKET

It was not till then that we realized the war was over, really and truly. Huge bonfires were built and tent flaps thrown open to let out the once forbidden light. V-E Day at last!

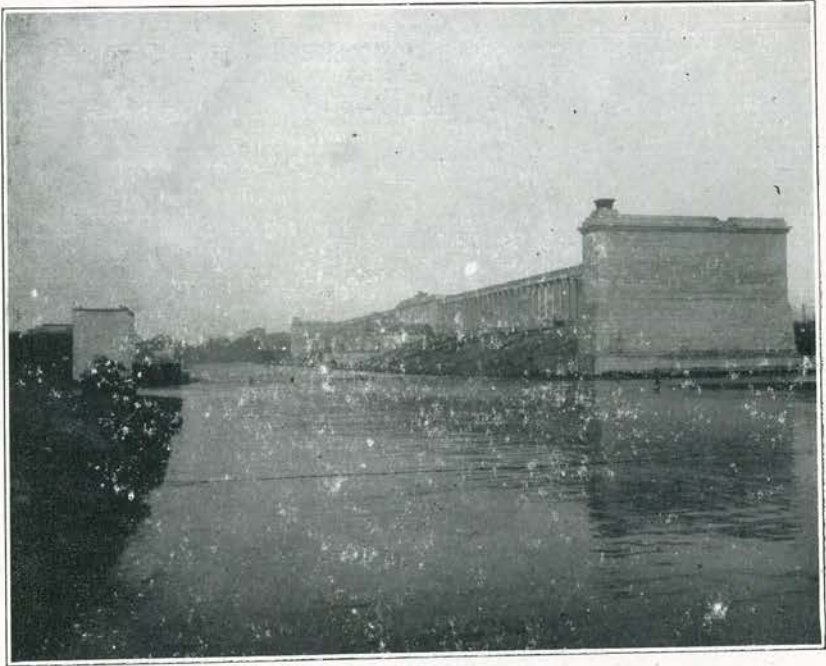
The morning of 11 May 1945, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion moved out of Zolling, and after a day-long voyage on the Munich-Berlin autobahn, arrived at Gefrees, north of Bayreuth. Here we moved into buildings. A few days later, billets were found for us in the city of Bayreuth, and on 14 May 1945, we moved into them. Headquarters and Headquarters and Service Company occupied an apartment building, as did Company C. Company B lived in the remaining sections of the once beautifully furnished theater. Company A occupied well furnished German barracks at Stadt Steinach. In Bayreuth, our main tasks were posting signs on the autobahn, destroying German demolition, supervising various PW's at work, furnishing equipment for evacuation of dead from bombed-out buildings, and maintaining roads.



TRANSPORTING POW'S

On 11 June 1945, the Battalion moved from Bayreuth to Nurnberg, Germany. This city, once hot-bed of fanatic Nazism, was nothing but a huge pile of rubble. The main jobs given to the Battalion were the repair of the Nurnberg Stadium, repair of the Linde Stadium for conversion to a Red Cross Club, and construction of railroad sidings for Quartermaster Depot. When Glenn Miller's band entertained in the Nurnberg stadium, the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion's Company A constructed the stage and decorated it. The red and white cloth used once decorated the stage for Hitler's pompous paganism.

On 15 June 1945, the first group of men left the Battalion for discharge under the point system. A week later, it was announced that the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion was a Category IV unit, scheduled for demobilization. All men with less than the critical score were to be transferred out of the organization, and men with sufficient point credits for discharge were to be retained or transferred into the unit.



NURNBERG STADIUM

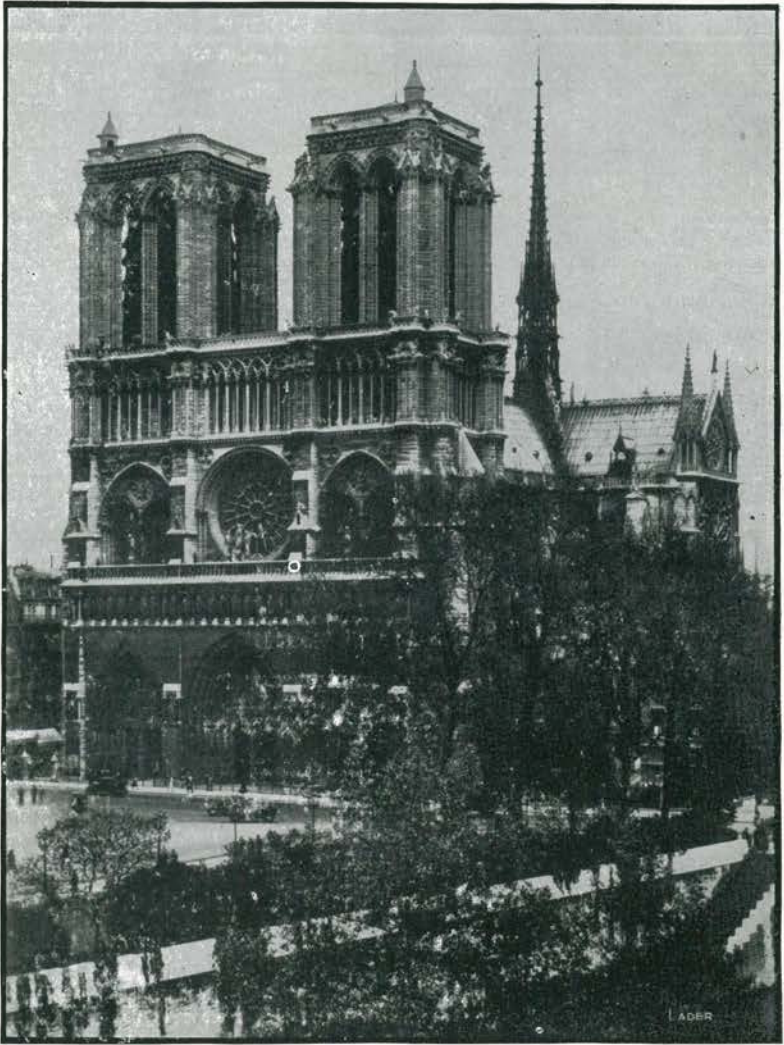


RR SPUR - QM DEPOT, NURNBERG

On 7 July 1945, over three hundred men, most of them men who had known no other outfit than the 299th Engineers, were loaded into our vehicles for the last trip as members of this organization.

At this time, too, our Commanding Officer left to assume a higher command. Despite farewells and departures, the strength and spirit of the unit remains in the hearts of those men who were the Battalion. Some day, somewhere, we'll meet again; until then the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, your Battalion, bids you Godspeed and good luck.





NOTRE DAME

WHEN DUTY CALLED

We've laid aside our peaceful tasks,
We've packed our kits and gone to war ;
We love the things we left behind,
But loved our country even more.
And though we lie in some strange land,
Forgotten, perhaps, by all but God,
We rest in peace because we know
Transgressors' heels shall **never** grind
Our country's flag into the dust.
We know because we made it so.

—An American Soldier
(**Killed in Action**)

HEADQUARTERS
FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY
APO 230

9 May 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation of Major General James A. Van Fleet, 03847.
TO : Major General James A. Van Fleet, Commanding General, III
Corps, APO 303.

On this day of victory in Europe I want to congratulate you and the fighting III Corps on the contribution you have made to the defeat of the German Army.

From the time your corps joined First Army on 13 February through its relentless drive to the Rhine, the brilliant bridgehead operation at Remagen and the reduction of the Ruhr pocket its record has been an outstanding one. The troops under your command have fought with courage and determination. Your leadership has been forceful and inspiring.

I desire to commend you, your staff and the officers and men of the units who have served under you. Please let them know I am deeply appreciative of their accomplishments and accept my best personal wishes to you and to III Corps for continued success.

|s| Courtney H. Hodges

COURTNEY H. HODGES
General, U. S. Army,
Commanding

HEADQUARTERS III CORPS
Office of the Commanding General
APO 303, U. S. Army

200 6 GNNLD

12 March 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation
TO : See Distribution.

It is a pleasure to transmit to the officers and soldiers of this Corps the gratification and commendation of both the Supreme Commander and the Commanding General of our Army:

"THE WHOLE ALLIED FORCE IS DELIGHTED TO CHEER THE FIRST U. S. ARMY WHOSE SPEED AND BOLDNESS HAVE WON THE RACE TO ESTABLISH THE FIRST BRIDGEHEAD OVER THE RHINE. PLEASE TELL ALL RANKS HOW PROUD I AM." SIGNED EISENHOWER, SUPREME COMMANDER. TO COMMANDING GENERAL III CORPS, COMMANDING GENERAL V CORPS, COMMANDING GENERAL VII CORPS FROM CG FIRST U. S. ARMY, SIGNED HODGES, "TO THE MEN OF THE FIRST U. S. ARMY WHO WON THIS RACE, I EXTEND MY CONGRATULATIONS. I SHARE THE PRIDE OF THE SUPREME COMMANDER IN THEIR FINE ACHIEVEMENT."

|s| John Millikin

JOHN MILLIKIN
Major General, U. S. Army,
Commanding

DISTRIBUTION:
"B" and "D"



EIFFEL TOWER

HEADQUARTERS 1ST ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

APO 1, United States Army

1 March 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation.

THROUGH: Commanding General, III Corps, APO 303, US Army.

TO : Commanding Officer, 1159th Engineer Combat Group,
APO 230, US Army.

On 20 February 1945 the 1159th Engineer Combat Group was assigned the mission of supporting the 1st US Infantry Division in its crossing of the Roer River. The thoroughness of your Planning and the cooperation enthusiasm, and efficiency of your organizations were clearly demonstrated by the completion of all assigned bridges within thirty hours after leading elements of the divisions jumped off. The officers and men under your command are to be highly commended for the resourcefulness and zeal which they displayed in carrying out their vital role in the division's successful attack.

|s| William B. Gara
Lieut. Colonel, 1st Engr Combat Bn,
Commanding

HEADQUARTERS III CORPS

Office of the Commanding General

APO 303, U. S. Army

200.6 GNNLD

7 April 1945

SUBJECT: Order of the Day.

TO : See Distribution.

1. The following Order of the Day from the Supreme Commander is published:

"TO EVERY MEMBER OF THE AEF. THE ENCIRCLEMENT OF THE RUHR BY A WIDE PINNER MOVEMENT HAS CUT OFF THE WHOLE OF ARMY GROUP "B" AND PARTS OF ARMY GROUP "H", THUS FORMING A LARGE POCKET OF ENEMY TROOPS WHOSE FATE IS SEALED AND WHO ARE RIPE FOR ANNIHILATION. THE MOST VITAL INDUSTRIAL AREA IS DENIED TO THE GERMAN WAR POTENTIAL. THIS MAGNIFICENT FEAT OF ARMS WILL BRING THE WAR MORE RAPIDLY TO A CLOSE IT WILL LONG BE REMEMBERED IN HISTORY AS AN OUTSTANDING BATTLE—THE BATTLE OF THE RUHR. SIGNED, DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER."

2. Contents will be made known to all officers and enlisted men of your command.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL VAN FLEET:

|s| H. R. Moore
H. R. MOORE
Colonel, A. G. D.
Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION: "B" and "F"
Non-div units - 2 ea

**HEADQUARTERS
THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY**

APO 403

GENERAL ORDERS

9 May 1945

NUMBER 98

SOLDIERS OF THE THIRD ARMY, PAST AND PRESENT

During the 281 days of incessant and victorious combat, your penetrations have advanced farther in less time than any other army in history. You have fought your way across 24 major rivers and innumerable lesser streams. You have liberated or conquered more than 82,000 square miles of territory, including 1500 cities and towns, and some 12,000 inhabited places. Prior to the termination of active hostilities, you had captured in battle 956,000 enemy soldiers and killed or wounded at least 500,000 others. France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia bear witness to your exploits.

All men and women of the six corps and thirty-nine divisions that have at different times been members of this Army have done their duty. Each deserves credit. The enduring valor of the combat troops has been paralleled and made possible by the often unpublicized activities of the supply, administrative, and medical services of this Army and of the Communications Zone troops supporting it. Nor should we forget our comrades of the other armies and of the Air Force, particularly of the XIX Tactical Air Command, by whose side or under whose wings we have had the honor to fight.

In proudly contemplating our achievements, let us never forget our heroic dead whose graves mark the course of our victorious advances, nor our wounded whose sacrifices aided so much to our success.

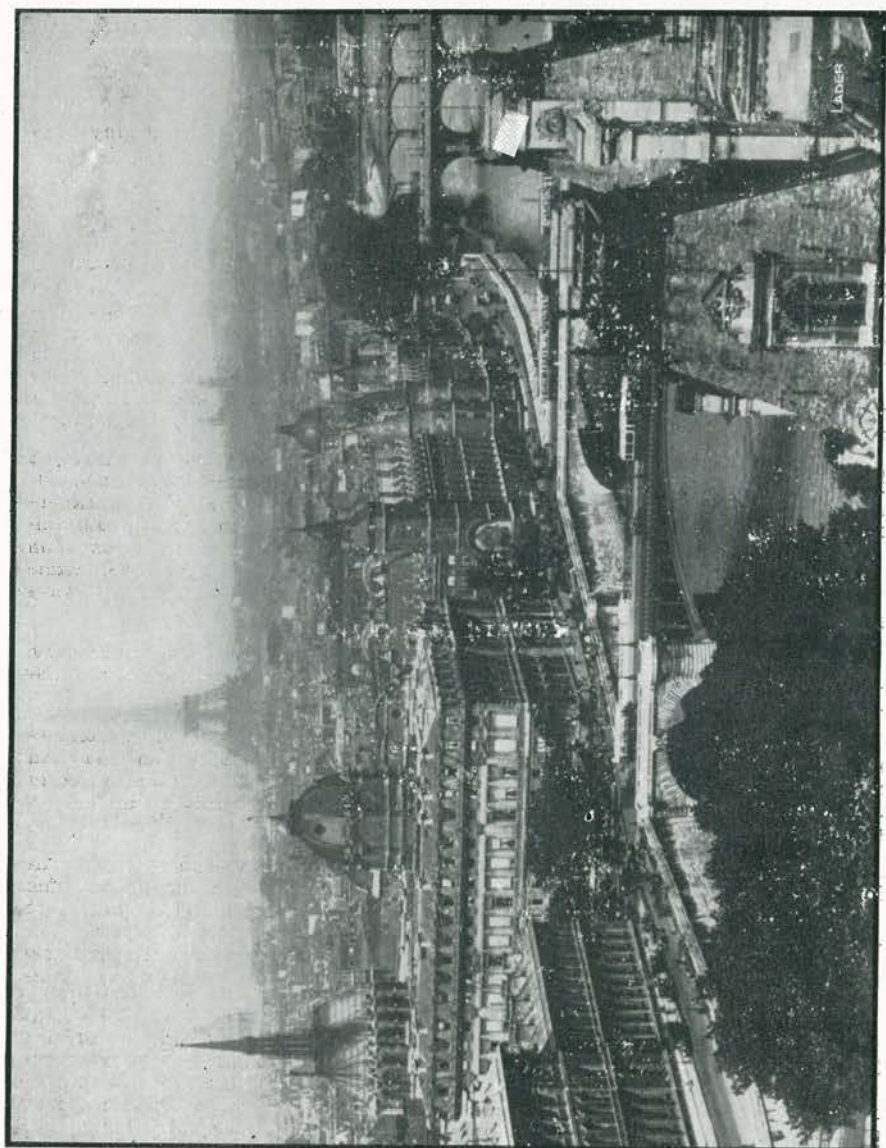
I should be both ungrateful and wanting in candor if I failed to acknowledge the debt we owe to our Chiefs of Staff, Generals Gaffey and Gay, and to the officers and men of the General and Special Staff Sections of Army Headquarters. Without their loyalty, intelligence, and unremitting labors, success would have been impossible.

The termination of fighting in Europe does not remove the opportunities for other outstanding and equally difficult achievements in the days which are to come. In some ways, the immediate future will demand of you more fortitude than has the past, because, without the inspiration of combat, you must maintain—by your dress, deportment, and efficiency—not only the prestige of the Third Army but also the honor of the United States. I have complete confidence that you will not fail.

During the course of this war I have received promotions and decorations far above and beyond my individual merit. You won them; I as your representative wear them. The one honor which is mine and mine alone is that of having commanded such an incomparable group of Americans, the record of whose fortitude, audacity, and valor will endure as long as history lasts.

[s] G. S. Patton, Jr.

G. S. PATTON, JR.
General



PARIS

During the period 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945 the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion received the following awards:

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION

BRONZE SERVICE STAR
Normandy Campaign

BRONZE SERVICE STAR
Northern France Campaign

BRONZE SERVICE STAR
Rhineland Campaign

BRONZE SERVICE STAR
Ardennes Campaign

BRONZE SERVICE STAR
Central Europe Campaign

BRONZE ARROWHEAD
Awarded all men participating in the initial assault on the North Coast of France, 6 June 1944.

HEADQUARTERS
299TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APO 403

7 July 1945

TO: Officers and Men, 299th Engineers.

A new assignment terminates my duty with the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion.

Since 12 April 1943, when I joined the battalion, I have seen our organization develop into a seasoned, battle-tested, and efficient unit. The esprit de corps, and enthusiasm displayed by every member has materially aided our accomplishments.

On leaving I wish to thank each member for his cooperation and to express my personal regards by wishing you and the Battalion good luck wherever you may go.

Milton A. Jewett

MILTON A. JEWETT,
Lt. Colonel, CE,
Commanding



Allen, Wallace J.
 Boehmer, Albert R.
 Bohnert, Earl
 Brown, Claude D. Jr.
 Burt, Charles L.
 Canavan, Michael J. Jr.
 Cartwright, Raymond L.
 Cassidy, Albert B.
 Czech, Teofil J.
 Davies, Carl E.
 DeAngelis, Nicholas
 Derow, Richard J.
 Dorney, Edward L. Jr.
 Duquette, Joseph D.
 Eichhorn, Ernest A.
 Evanoff, James V.
 Fatty, Kenneth
 Fulam, Francis W.
 Gordan, Stephen
 Hettrick, Alvin B.
 Hissin, Jacob T.
 Hobson, Grover M.
 Horn, Lester J.
 Indelicato, Leo A.
 Isaac, Ronald H.
 Johnson, Rexlord L.
 Kennedy, Cyril J.
 Killijanski, Edward P.
 Kurzawski, Alfred F.

Legacy, Thomas E.
 Mack, Edgar M.
 Maier, John E.
 massenzio, Leo P.
 mills, Richard K.
 Mirowski, Edward S. ,
 Moritz, Robert J.
 Morris, Howard R.
 Mulvey, John M.
 Murphy, John P.
 McNerney, Bert B.
 Machreiner, Arthur J.
 O'Connor, Joseph M.
 Pardue, J. T.
 Pati, Adolpho
 Petoniak, Theodore J.
 Phillips, Thomas J.
 Pidich, Charles
 Prezzavento, Carmelo R.

Redmond, James M.
 Kiley, Cyril J.
 Robenstein, Wesley J.
 Roberts, Lawrence A.
 Rudolph, Harold H.
 Rybak, Leo
 Rybarczyk, Raymond J.
 Scanlon, William J.
 Scrivner, Floyd L.
 Shimkonis, Joseph J.
 Smith, John B.
 Snell, Daniel W.
 Spinelli, John R.
 Stillwell, Harold
 Stoehr, Allen J.
 Szarletta, Henry
 Terryberry, William
 Thayer, George E.
 Tier, Alfred G.
 Webster, Alfred W.
 Wendell, George L.
 Wendt, William C.
 Wenz, Frederick
 Wetterhahn, Clarence D.
 Whonhart, Francis C.
 Works, Bernard J.
 Wood, Charles L.
 Wylie, Donald H.
 Zarro, Alex A.



KILLED IN ACTION

Thayer, Dale R.
"man"

