

Fort Dix, New Jersey - N.Y. POE

January 1944

March 1944

No, this was the real thing.

For the first time in nearly two years of training the battalion lived in regular furnace heated barracks each of which contained a shower section. Though the "modified field ration" used in the desert had been much better than some that lay ahead, the garrison ration of Dix was really "something".

Much of the heavier equipment had been turned in before the battalion left the desert and now a large portion of the remaining supplies and equipment were turned over to Fort Dix supply installations. Complete sets of new equipment were already overseas and the battalion would be re-supplied in the theater of operations, but individual clothing and TAT items were checked and double checked.

Time was now devoted to making each man POM qualified. Firing was again the major item and again combat problems were run through a mock village. Since most of the battalion vehicles had already been turned in. The Fort Dix narrow gage railway was used to transport the troops to and from the various ranges.

The prerequisites for overseas movement fortunately included the items of a furlough for each man. With about a third of each company off on leave at all times the farewell visits were soon completed. On 15 March, when the battalion received additional replacements, the unit was at full strength and ready to go.

At a final review the division received a large flag of the "Republic of Texas" from a group of War I veterans of the 90th. The Texas delegation also presented a box of "Sacred Texas Soil" in which the flag staff was destined to be emplaced, more than a year later, at the Wermacht Training Center at Graffenwohr, Bavaria.

On the morning of 18 February 1944 the division advance detachment had left Fort Dix for the POE. Included were four officers and men of the 315th Engineers who were to make preparations for the battalion's arrival overseas.

On 1 March Major Claire E. Groves, from the 69th Infantry Division and Major Leonard G. Sibeck, from the 86th Infantry Division, joined the battalion. Major Groves succeeded Major Tabor as battalion commander and the latter was transferred to Camp Pickett, Va. on March 4, but on 11 March Major Groves was transferred to Camp Butner, N.C. and Major Sibeck assumed command. On 17 March the battalion departed for Camp Kilmer and the N.Y. POE and after five days of processing, it entrained for Jersey City where it was shuttled by ferry to the Staten Island terminal on 21 March 1944.

This was it! The battalion was on its way! But again troubles beset the unit. This time it was engine trouble and the "John Ericsson" was forced to leave the convoy at 2000 hours and return with an escort to enter dry dock at the foot of 23rd street in New York. Here within sight of the bright lights of the city the battalion was to wait on board a ship in a dry dock for four days while one of the mighty diesels was being repaired.

A new convoy was forming on 28 March and the "John Ericsson" was floated again to sail at 1030 for a second attempt at crossing the Atlantic.

From a seaman's point of view the 10 day voyage was probably without particular incident, but many of the land-lubbers spent considerable time feeding the fish and expected to be sent to the bottom most any day by u-boats.

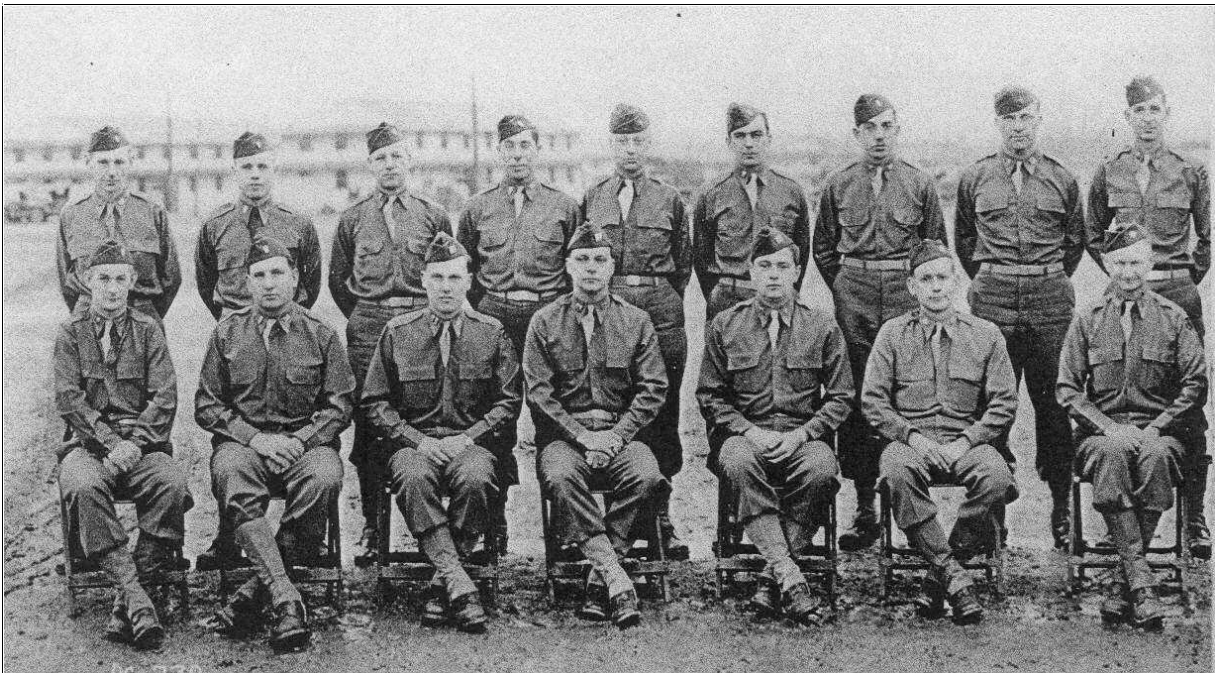


Figure 3-1

Lt Steinborn, Lt Poczik, Lt Cowan, Lt Denbaigh, Lt Keagy, Lt Craven, Lt Campbell, Lt
Ackerman, Lt Wimmert
Lt Bauer, Lt Midyett, Capt Thompson, Capt Perry, Capt Evans, Maj Gilchrist,
Maj Tabor (CO)

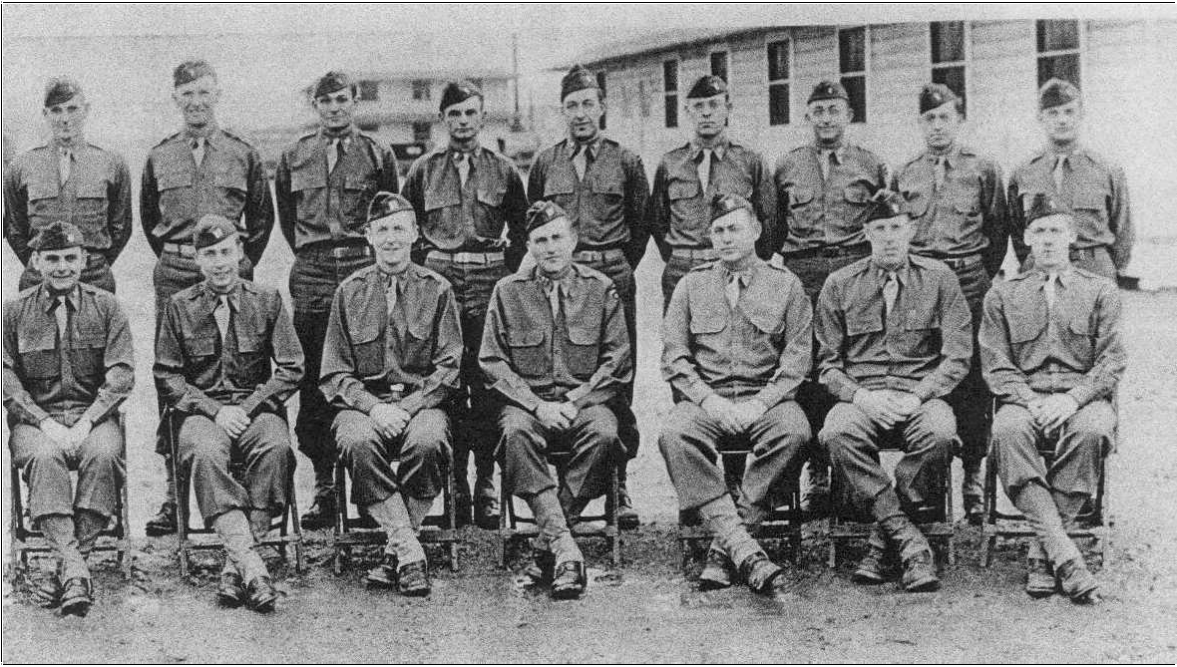


Figure 3-2

Lt Cooper, Lt Brannick, Mr De Gasparis, Lt Horne, Lt Yuska, Lt Starr, Mr Stubblefield
Maj Nelson, Capt Rhodes, Capt Stromquist, Capt St Clair, Capt Symes, Lt Jacobson

England – Wales

April 1944

May 1944

In the meantime the advance detachment had staged at Fort Hamilton, sailed aboard the "Queen Mary" on 1 March and had arrived in Greenock, Scotland on the 6th. A Scottish band, complete with bagpipes and kilts, had played ancient tunes and the ultra-modern "Deep in the Heart of Texas" as the 90th Division advance guard entrained for Birmingham in the midlands of England.

Initially stationed with the division headquarters group in the old "King Edward School" on Bristol Rd. the advance detachment made plans and preparations for the reception, training and the equipping of the battalion which was soon to arrive.

In the Mersey River channel off Liverpool, England, the "John Ericsson" arrived at 0800 on 8 April 1944. Debarcation was made on to the floating docks during 9-10 April and the companies immediately entrained for their respective camps.

Upon arrival of the battalion in England Major Carlton L. Nelson, who had been with the advance detachment, took over the command from Major Sibeck. Then, on 12 April 1944, Major Nelson was transferred to the G-3 Section in Division Headquarters and Major Frank Gilchrist was appointed battalion commander.

Division headquarters was located in Birmingham and the troops were dispersed in five tent camps on an approximate 50 mile radius west of the city. Company A went to Davenport Hall in Northern Shropshire with a portion of the division artillery. Company B was assigned to Kinlet Hall near Kidderminster with a part of the 357th Infantry. Company C moved into Camp Stanage near Knighton, Radnor, Wales. Battalion Headquarters, H & S Company and the Medical Detachment were established with the 359th Infantry at Herrington Park in Herefordshire near Leominster.

Again the 315th Engineers became post engineers in addition to their other duties. Although some of the camps bore fancy designations as parks, halls and commons, the living quarters for the battalion were all of tentage. The names of Davenport, Kinlet and Berrington had all been adopted from the titles of the old English estates on which the camps were situated. Ablution huts, kitchens, mess halls, drying rooms and headquarters buildings were all of the prefabricated quonset or nisson type. British and American troops and British contractors had done good jobs but again, as in the case of Camp Granite in the desert, work had stopped prior to completion. The 315th Engineers again went into the construction and utility business. Each engineer company did work at its respective camp and special details were sent to Stuart Common, Camp Gatacre and King Edwards School, the other division camps where no engineer troops were stationed.

But it was soon realized that the stay in England would not be long and the post engineer work was restricted to the absolute essentials. The battalion continued its physical conditioning, received and processed new equipment and supplies. Experimented with hedgerow breaching on Clee Hill near Tenbury, constructed a floating bailey bridge on the river Severn [Figure 4-1] and some men and officers observed the pre-invasion practice landings at Slapton Sands near Torqay on the channel coast.

By the first of May the entire battalion had been re-supplied with its full T/O & E allowances and schools were conducted in the waterproofing of vehicles.

During the stay in England, the men were granted short passes to the nearby towns where they learned to know their British Allies over the warm ale and beer of local pubs. The soldiers, however, were not here

for fun, but for the most serious business they had ever undertaken and they knew it. Each one privately wondered and guessed about D-Day and the part that the 90th might play in that or later landings. The wide field of speculation was narrowed considerably when on 11 May Company C loaded for combat and moved from Camp Stanage by motor convoy to Cort-Y-Gollen near Crickhowell.

Then, on the 13th, Battalion Headquarters, H & S Company, and the Medical Detachment moved from Berrington Park to Heath Camp at Cardiff. On the same day Companies A and B moved from Davenport and Kinlet to Camp Bulwark near Chepstow. All elements of the battalion and the division were now on the southern coast of Wales along the Bristol Channel. It was here that the men had their first experience with enemy planes and bombs. Although the attack was not directed against any of the battalion's camps, but at a coastal city several miles away, the exploding bombs sounded as though they were falling in the next field.

During the two weeks in this so called "transit area" all mess, fatigue and other details were handled by service troops. Physical conditioning was continued, equipment and supplies were rechecked, vehicles were waterproofed and the personnel in each company was divided into 3 groups. The rear echelon group which included the clerical and mess personnel with their equipment moved to a central division rendezvous point at Bournemouth. The vehicular group consisting of drivers, assistant drivers and maintenance personnel prepared to carry ashore all supplies and equipment which were to be needed for the initial operations. Some were to carry explosives, others mine detectors and still others communication equipment. All of this in addition to full packs and K rations for 3 days. Final practice in climbing of cargo nets was conducted and still there had been no news announcement that the sea borne assault on "Festung Europa" had begun. It looked as if the old 90th of Barkeley, Granite and Dix might be loading up for one the first assault waves.

During the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of June the companies moved to their designated "hards" and loaded aboard with the vehicular and marching parties of each company on at least two different ships. Elements of the battalion were on nine individual vessels and there was much wondering whether it would ever reassemble as the convoy formed up in the Bristol Channel on 5 June 1944.

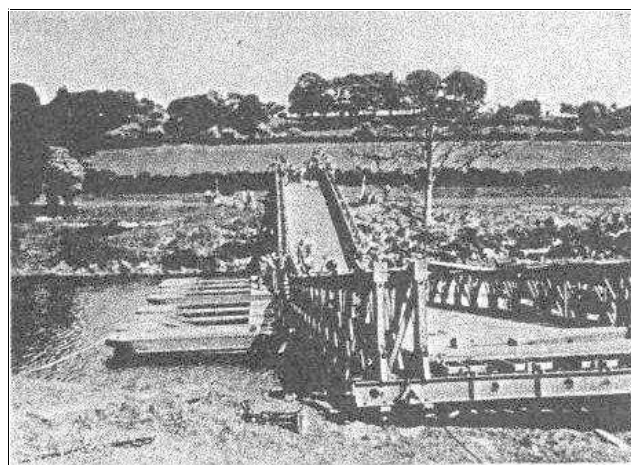


Figure 4-1