

**FABRICAMOS**

**FROM  
CAMP BARKELEY, TEXAS  
TO  
SUSCICE, CZECHOSLAVAKIA**

**FEBRUARY 1942 - MAY 1945**

**A HISTORY OF  
THE 315TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION  
OF THE 90TH INFANTRY DIVISION**

**BY FRANK GILCHRIST  
JULY 1949**

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## **Camp Barkeley, Texas**

### **February 1942 August 1943**

The tents of Barkeley snapped and ripped in the cold winds, which swept in from the higher plains of the west Texas panhandle. The oversize gas heaters warmed the pyramids quickly only to have gusts of wind suddenly exhaust the warmth and refill the canvases with sand laden coldness. Such were the greetings, which awaited the activation cadres arriving from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in February and March of 1942.

Officially born on 25 February 1942, the World War II version of the 315th Engineers received its cadre of 17 officers from the Engineer Replacement Training Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and 52 men from the 6th Engineer Battalion of the 6th Division also at Fort Wood at that time.

The Thunderbird (45th Div-Okla Natl Gd) had been ordered into federal service and were already training at Barkeley. To the seasoned soldiers the thought of giving up their cantonment area for some new outfit was most repulsive. But gradually the shift was made and as the 45th Division moved into another section of the camp the cadre of the 315th took over the area, which was to be its base of training operations for a year and a half.

Mess halls were made ready, supplies were received, training schedules were prepared and a thousand other details were pursued in preparation for the fillers, which were to arrive early in April.

During World War I the 90th Division had been what is now called a "Square Division" and the 315th Engineers were then a regiment. In the new 90th which was of the streamlined triangular organization, the 315th Engineer Combat Battalion inherited the history, battle streamers and unit insignia of its regimental predecessor. The coat of arms, with the traditional red and white background of the corps of engineers, bore the outline of that famous shrine of Texas independence, the Alamo. Atop the shield stood a statuette of the pioneer soldier-citizen with his muzzle loader signifying the peacetime reserve status of the organization. The Spanish influence in the southwest was reflected in the motto "Fabricamos" (we build), and then, for service in France during War I, the fleur-de-lis completed the distinctive insignia under which the 315th Engineer Battalion was activated. Unlike its predecessor of World War I, which drew its strength from Texas and Oklahoma, fillers this time came from almost every part of the union with probably the mid-western states the best represented.

The city of View, Texas was the railhead, train load after train load of filler personnel for the division were shuttled into the warehouse area of Camp Barkeley during the period 1-8 April 1942. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Edwin P. Ketchum, and his staff met the groups, which were assigned to the 315th. The men were marched to the battalion area and for them the war began 8 April 1942 on which date basic training was begun.

Later, during the "pay off" in Europe, bronze battle stars were awarded for campaign participation, but for the "Battle of Barkeley" many of the men thought that the award could well have been a miniature jack rabbit carrying a full field pack and a pick and shovel. For these were rigorous days. Calisthenics before breakfast, close order drill, tactics, marksmanship, marches with full packs and pioneer and engineer training all were conducted to prepare the unit for combat operations. Time after time even during the individual squad and platoon training the battalion was "abuzz" with rumors that the 90th Infantry Division was "hot" and scheduled to sail within a month. But time after time the battalion fought battles over the "high ground south of Elm Creek" and time after time the unit marched to Hankins Ranch and up to the top of "Demolition Hill". Running of the obstacle course over by the field house and the digging of antitank ditches in the area south of the motor pool were the order of the day.

By 27 June 1942, with the new 315th on a firm footing, Colonel Ketchum was promoted and was transferred to a higher post. Major Richard G. Stilwell, the battalion executive officer, became battalion commander and again the "dope" was that the division would be going overseas right away. But,

instead a cadre school was organized and during the second week of August a complete enlisted cadre graduated and was sent from the battalion to form a nucleus for the engineer battalion of the new 104th "Timber Wolf" Division at camp Adair, Oregon.

Tactical problems now were at regimental combat team level and the companies were beginning to work with the regiments with which they were destined to fight the "Kraut" across Europe.

Lake Abilene was the scene of assault "river" crossings, of bridging and rafting operations and all knew that this training was to become invaluable in combat. The post engineer rapidly converted the old tent frames into plywood hutments and the "Battle of Berkeley" moved on.

On 15 September the division changed from an infantry to a motorized organization much to the initial glee of the infantry troops. Actually the change had little effect upon the engineers for the battalion was already motorized to the extent that each man theoretically had an assigned vehicular space in which to ride. It did, however, add Company D (a reconnaissance company) and, an H & S Company. And a bridge train. Both were organized and partially trained, although never fully equipped.

The relocation of Texas highways had caused the abandonment and isolation of several large bridges. Such structures were ideal demolition projects and the first of several major demolition operations was conducted during October on the "Old Red Bluff" bridge across the Colorado River between Lometa and San Saba, Texas.

In coordination with an VIII Corps cavalry unit and elements of the 90th Reconnaissance Squadron, a tactical problem was worked out which called for a retreat across and demolition of this 150 ft steel truss bridge. Elaborate preparations were made. The nationwide drive for collection of scrap steel and iron added another interesting angle. Governor Coke Stevenson was to be there. The division commander, Major General Henry Terrell, would witness the problem and the engineer school at Fort Belvoir, Va., sent Major Theodore F. Astrella as special demolitions consultant. Newsreel cameras would record the blast and the whole affair would be broadcast over the popular Sunday Afternoon program "The Army Hour".

After a 160 mile motor march to the site the battalion bivouacked in the scrub oak thickets on the east bank of the river. This was the first real battalion bivouac and all elements were operating together in the field. Preliminary special classes in demolitions were conducted, tactical problems were executed but during the two days of preparations all attention was really focused upon the hour when the blasting machine handle would be twisted and the bridge would fall.

Sunday morning was clear and by noon all was in readiness. Bunkers for the cameramen had been built of sand bags. Telephone lines were tested, firing circuits were checked, dignitaries and nearby townspeople assembled on the new bridge up-stream from the old red bluff. As the appointed hour drew near, everything was in readiness and families of many of the men of the battalion were at their radios throughout the nation listening to the very special program on "The Army Hour".

The problem began. The covering force withdrew while dynamite charges in the water simulated artillery fire. The situation was explained to the assembled audience and read into the NBC microphone. Then, with precision timing, the Old Red Bluff Bridge was neatly clipped and dropped into the swirling Colorado.

But things weren't so well with the families at their radios for (so the story goes) a bird hunter between the bridge and San Saba had clipped the circuit with a very ill-timed shot. NBC called and called in vain but the program was being fed into a dead microphone. Later in the program the successful demolition was reported to "The Army Hour" listeners but the dramatic blast had been lost.

Heavy rains on the upstream watershed had caused a minor rise of the river before the demolition but after the bridge had been dropped across the channel the water continued to rise rapidly bringing with it large amounts of debris. This burden of logs and trash piled up against the bridge and created such a pressure against it that during the night the bridge was overturned and completely submerged.

This began the 315th Engineers long record of experience with flooded streams. The salvage of steel from the bridge was an important part of the problem but the river continued to rise making underwater cutting charges unprofitable. The battalion returned to Camp Barkeley. Later, after the flood had subsided, Company B, with extra acetylene torches, demolition charges and power cranes returned to cut up, remove and salvage the steel.

Another of the bridge demolition projects was located south of the city of Sweetwater, Texas. Here, in the sheep pasture, was an old reinforced concrete queen truss bridge, which was easily demolished during a night tactical problem. This time, however, wide publicity had not been given the project. Sabotage and rumors of sabotage had been claiming the newspaper headlines for several weeks. That night when the bridge blast rattled windows in Sweetwater the residents were quite willing to believe a vicious rumor that saboteurs had destroyed the municipal water supply plant of this city where threats of water shortages were a constant fear. But this time the radio system worked and the population was quickly reassured.

During the months of December and January the lettered companies with their respective combat team regiments, and later the battalion as a whole, completed the regimental combat team and divisional unit training phases in the mesquite and juniper covered hills of Barkeley maneuver area. These problems were conducted under simulated combat conditions. The weather was extremely cold at times, but fires and other comforts, which a soldier in combat is denied were taboo here also. The men were in fine physical condition each having gained an average of 10 pounds and were beginning to feel that they now were ready for real soldiering.

The men knew their individual jobs, they had learned to work together as teams and were ready for some big-scale maneuvering. On 26 January 1943, the battalion moved with the division 500 miles by truck over ice and snow covered highways to the vicinity of Leesville, Louisiana.

During the next two months the division was engaged in third army maneuvers against the 77th Infantry Division. The piney woods of East Texas and the densely thicketed swamps of the Kisatchee Forest along the Sabine River, the burned over wasteland of Peason Ridge, the five bridges west of Anacoco, the mud without bottom, the assault crossing of the river and the bridging at Toledo Ferry and at Burr Ferry all gave the 315th an inkling of what was to come.

Here, with its 183 vehicles, the battalion made blackout marches and many were the damaged transmissions, oil pans, brake lines and steering trains, for the knee high stumps made excellent anti-vehicular obstacles in the inky darkness. The real engineer-pioneer problems were, as always, the roads. Hundreds of yards of corduroy were laid, bridges were repaired and in one case, where a Sherman tank tried to cross a class 2 structure, the battalion completely built a bridge.

During the advance against the 77th the infantrymen were ferried across the Sabine. Footbridges were built and then pontoon bridges were erected only to be "knocked out" by cub planes dropping small paper sacks of flour. In their retreat almost every bridge was declared destroyed and, in order to fulfill the maneuver requirement rules, timber trestle bents were erected alongside to simulate a portion of the repair work which would probably have been necessary in real action.

But soon it was the 90th's time to retreat and in doing so the 315th covered strategic members of most bridges with "wooden TNT" blocks connected together with "Marlien primacord". The delaying action allowed the division to barely escape to the Texas side of the river where it prepared to defend the river line.

During the night before the dawn on which the 77th was expected to make its assault crossing a specially selected team of the 315th played havoc with the enemy's lines of communication. After crossing to the "enemy side" in rubber boats under cover of darkness, the team made its way through the lines and to a point several miles to their rear to attack a vital bridge on a main road. Although well guarded by the "blues" the team stealthily approached and attached their charges underneath the bridge while the guards stood watch above. The "TNT" was primed and the "fuse" was lit and the umpire

declared "out", the bridge over which a major portion of the 77th was soon scheduled to pass. A portion of the team was captured in the melee but others escaped and returned in the reconnaissance boats to report the success of the mission.

The battalion made an excellent record in Louisiana and later in Normandy and across Europe the maneuvers against the 77th Division were recalled as probably the most valuable single period of training.

When the battalion loaded its equipment in preparation for the Louisiana maneuvers it was good bye to Texas – especially to Camp Barkeley for surely the division would soon be ready and would move directly to an overseas staging base. But, 2 April 1943 found the battalion and the division at Camp Barkeley. Experience had demonstrated that the infantry division organization was the better for the probable theaters of operation so the 90th was reorganized. This time it was from a motorized division back to an infantry division and within the 315th Engineer Battalion Company D and the bridge train in H & S Company were deactivated. Personnel of these organizations were transferred to other units within the battalion.

Training continued with stress being placed on physical conditioning and combat firing. For use by all units of the division, the battalion built a mock Nazi village through which street fighting problems were run. For combat team problems in the assault of fortified positions the battalion constructed, in the artillery impact area, a mock-up section of a fortified area complete with camouflaged concrete gun embrasures, concrete anti-tank obstacles, anti-tank ditches and wire entanglements. Then, in teams with the infantry, elements of the battalion engaged in the breaching of the fortifications using pole charges, satchel charges, bangalore torpedoes and flame throwers. By now it seemed that the battalion's future theater of operations was fairly well defined. But again immediate overseas shipment was delayed and the nearest thing to combat for the battalion was the fighting of savage brush fires and the repairing of fences on Hankins Ranch.

As the month of August drew to a close most of the men thought that the time had come for them to prove themselves. They did not know, however, that the army was not sparing any expense or being rushed when it came to readying for combat one of its crack units. So, in early September 1943 the division was loading and speeding westward by train with the 315th Engineer Battalion leading the way to complete construction work on the division camp in the California-Arizona maneuver area.

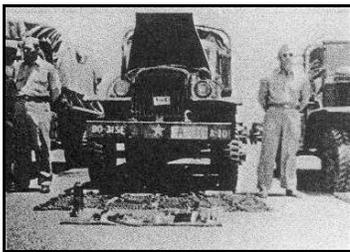


Figure 1-1

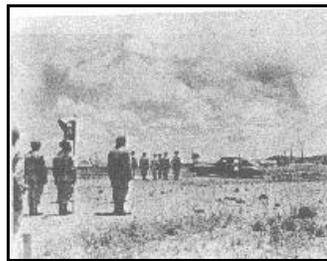


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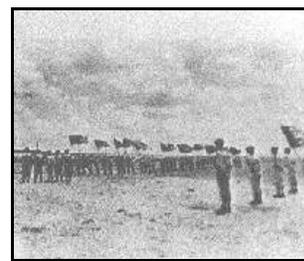


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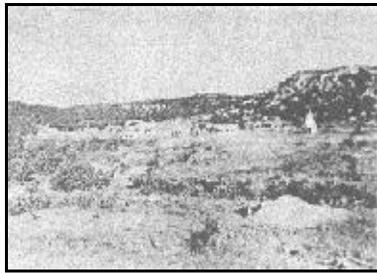


Figure 1-4

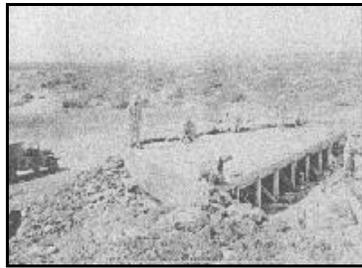


Figure 1-5

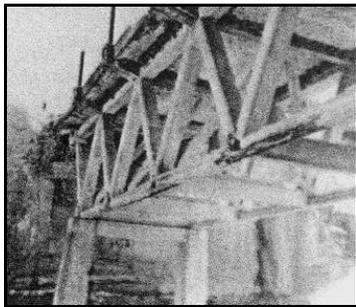


Figure 1-6

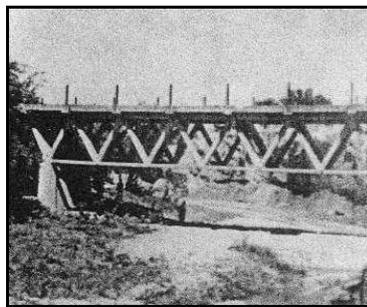


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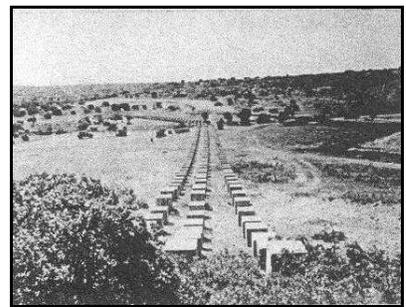


Figure 1-8

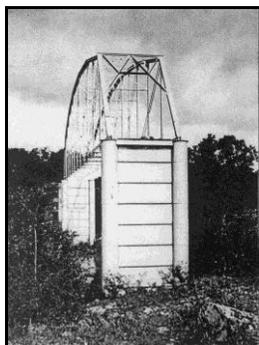


Figure 1-9

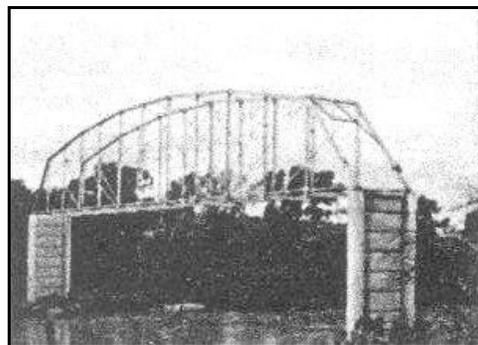


Figure 1-10

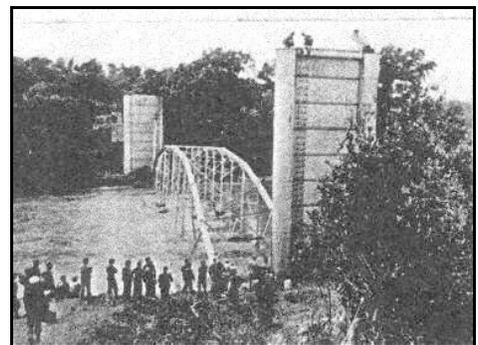


Figure 1-11

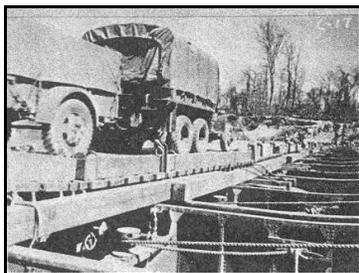


Figure 1-12

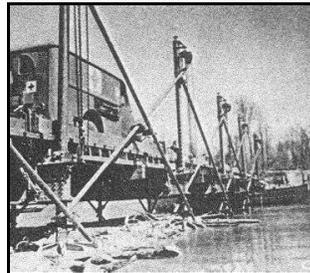


Figure 1-13



Figure 1-14

## **Camp Granite, California**

### **September 1943 December 1943**

Although the fighting in North Africa had ended by this time, training in the desert was considered highly valuable from the standpoint of physical conditioning, moving and maintaining direction at night, operating efficiently with limited water and food supplies and for logistical experience. Camp Granite was a tent camp located in the Mojave Desert of southeastern California. [Figure 2-1] Forty miles east of Desert Center and about the same distance west of Parker, Arizona. This new base of operations for the 90th was situated on a broad sand and volcanic rock plain at the base of a southern spur of the Granite Mountains.

An engineer general service regiment had been working on the camp for several months but had been transferred to another job leaving the streets only partially defined, the pumping system only partially installed, a few of the shower houses completed and most of the kitchen tent frames and latrines constructed. An advance party from the 315th Engineer Battalion had been on the site approximately two weeks when the battalion arrived at the Freda railhead on 3 September 1943. [Figure 2-2] Construction plans had been made and as soon as the battalion had pitched its pyramidal, [Figure 2-3] work assignments were begun, streets were graded and marked, shower houses were completed, plumbing was installed and to Company A went the honor of the layout and construction of facilities for division headquarters. But the completion and operation of the water supply system was to be the big problem.

Thin walled steel pipe had been laid from the partially completed pumping station to a partially finished elevated wooden storage tank but many long sections of the line had been left uncovered. During the day the sun beat down and heated the dry desert air to 115 degrees. In this heat the pipe expanded and buckled around in the trenches like a huge snake. Then, when each cold desert night suddenly closed in, the rapid contraction of the lines opened countless minor and many major breaks in the welded joints.

Fortunately the actual source of water was plentiful. From Parker Dam on the Colorado River 50 miles to the east, water flowed past Camp Granite in the Los Angeles metropolitan aqueduct. A huge fenced-in trapezoidal concrete ditch running some 300 miles into Los Angeles. [Figure 2-4] This open channel was tapped at a siphon under the Parker-Desert Center Highway near the point where the flow entered the Iron Mountain Pumping Station of the aqueduct system. Two gasoline motors of doubtful vintage driving a five stage centrifugal pump, of equally doubtful origin, constituted the primary equipment with which the H & S Company motor section was to supply water for the entire division camp. The distance from the intake to the elevated storage tank was approximately five miles and the lift was about 350 ft. Time and time again the pumps heaved the load up the main line and time and time again a joint would split and the system would have to be drained.

Finally, after much sweating, swearing and all night work, water was lifted to the storage tank but again an adequate camp supply was to be denied. The hot dry air had so thoroughly dehydrated the staves of the tank that even after careful preliminary caulking the water came out the cracks just about as fast as the pump could put it in. Furthermore, the downpour of water from the tank bottom scoured the ground and threatened to undermine the concrete foundations.

During all this time the infantry troops in the lower end of camp had water but the artillerymen on the high side of Granite did much plain and fancy swearing at the 315th "Post Engineer Battalion".

Gradually the staves began to swell and as the leaks diminished the water level assumed a more respectable height. Within three weeks, with major construction work accomplished, the battalion turned again to the training for the more important missions ahead. A small crew of H & S men continued to maintain and operate the camp utilities but the bulk of the battalion was again off on another round of combat firing. Anti-aircraft firing at towed targets and radio controlled miniature

planes and training with the regiments in RCT problems. During the interim at Camp Barkeley between Louisiana maneuvers and the movement to the desert, the battalion had conducted a series of squad leadership problems. The squads had made individual marches on given azimuths through the Barkeley thickets from one control point to the next. At each they received new instructions, additional rations and had marched off to another point with another squad mission. The last day of each of the squad problems involved the inflation of rubber boats and the crossing of Lake Abilene. Now, in the desert, it was time for platoon leadership problems.

In succession the lettered companies moved to a bivouac area between Highway 95 and the Colorado River about 25 miles north of Blythe, California. Here in an assumed tactical situation each platoon was ordered to ferry its vehicles across the Colorado and move to a point in the desert some 15 miles to the northwest where it was to organize a portion of a defensive position. (Actually the ferrying operation was from one point on the California side upstream to another point on the same side but technical problems involved were the same as for a cross-river operation)

Each morning a platoon would begin the five day problem by building a raft and ferrying its four 2½ ton dump trucks and jeep upstream to the designated landing site. Upon debarkation and assembly the "motorized" platoon was off into the desert on its first tactical mission. But each day as each successive platoon reached a certain fork in the road it was ambushed by a team from the control group armed with blank ammunition and previously prepared TNT charges simulating enemy fire.

In the skirmish all vehicles were ruled destroyed and the platoon was afoot for the duration of the 50 mile problem. Each day confronted the platoon with a new situation and a distance of about 10 miles to march across the greasewood and cactus covered wastelands. [Figure 2-5] The last night out involved the installation of a minefield and the defense of a road block across Highway 95.

All during the problem the platoons were subjected to surprise attacks and raids by details from the control group. The training was rugged but many a "kink" was eliminated which might have spelled disaster in the days to come.

About 150 miles to the southeast of Granite and near the city of Yuma, Arizona, on the Colorado River, there is a dam which diverts a portion of the river into the All American Canal that carries water to the fabulous imperial valley of Southern California. Below this dam the Engineer School of Fort Belvoir had established a station for the testing of floating bridges and other engineer equipment. Upon the invitation of Lt. Col. George W. Howard, chief of the bridge section, companies of the 315th moved in rotation to the testing sight and spent days in intensive bridge training. Here, in a stream, where the current could be regulated by the discharge gates on the dam, the value of the training for future combat operations greatly exceeded that which had been previously received on the still waters of Lake Abilene and in the sluggish current of the Sabine in Louisiana. The bridge training was cut short however, for on 21 October the battalion moved into the Harquahala Mountains area near Salome, Arizona.

Colonel Stilwell was promoted to the position of Division G-3 and Major C. C. Tabor had succeeded him as commander of the 315th Engineers when the first phase of the desert maneuvers began. With the entire division again in the field together, RCT problems were run in an area which had once been the scene of extensive gold mining operations. In the Harquahala, the Harcuvar and the Eagle Tail Mountains, battles were fought among the giant saguaro, the ocotillo and other species of the cactus family which have such a firm control of that area. Roads were mined, crater charges were prepared and some soldiers did a little private prospecting for gold on the side.

After three weeks of this maneuvering, the division moved back into California and to an assembly area south of the Chuckwalla Mountains near Glamis, California. From this area an attack was launched northward in a corps maneuver against the 93rd Infantry Division.

For 20 days the battle raged, and for about 10 of those days a blinding dust storm blew in from the northwest. Except for a narrow pass through the two mountain ranges to our front there was little

terrain, which favored "engineer" road and obstacle warfare. But from the standpoint of physical and mental conditioning for the combat ahead the maneuvers were excellent.

The 93rd doggedly defended and dropped back to defend again as the 90th advanced through the Chuckwallas, across the Desert Center-Blythe Highway and into the Granite Mountains. Here the principal battle was to be fought. Palen pass was a strongly fortified position astride the sand and rock filled road leading through the mountains, past our base camp (Granite). Past Rice and Freda and on northward toward Needles. After days of heavy fighting the infantry broke through the Palen fortifications and a pursuit was on. The maneuver ended on 1 December with the entire division north of the Parker Desert-Center Highway hotly striking at the 93rd Division's rear guard.

Now the troops of the 90th division were informed that this had been their last maneuver. All knew what this meant, but they were ready and did not mind saying goodbye to the desert with its sand and rocks, its blistering sun, its cold nights and its eternal loneliness.

But the "rumor mongers" ground cut another good one. This time the 90th was going back to Berkeley to fill up the foxholes on Hankins Ranch and would then become the home guard for the city of Abilene. Instead on 26 December 1943, the battalion entrained at Freda, made a transcontinental trip and arrived in Fort Dix, N. J. the night of 30 December 1943. Surely this would not be another "dry run".



Figure 2-1



Figure 2-2



Figure 2-3



Figure 2-4



Figure 2-5

## **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.

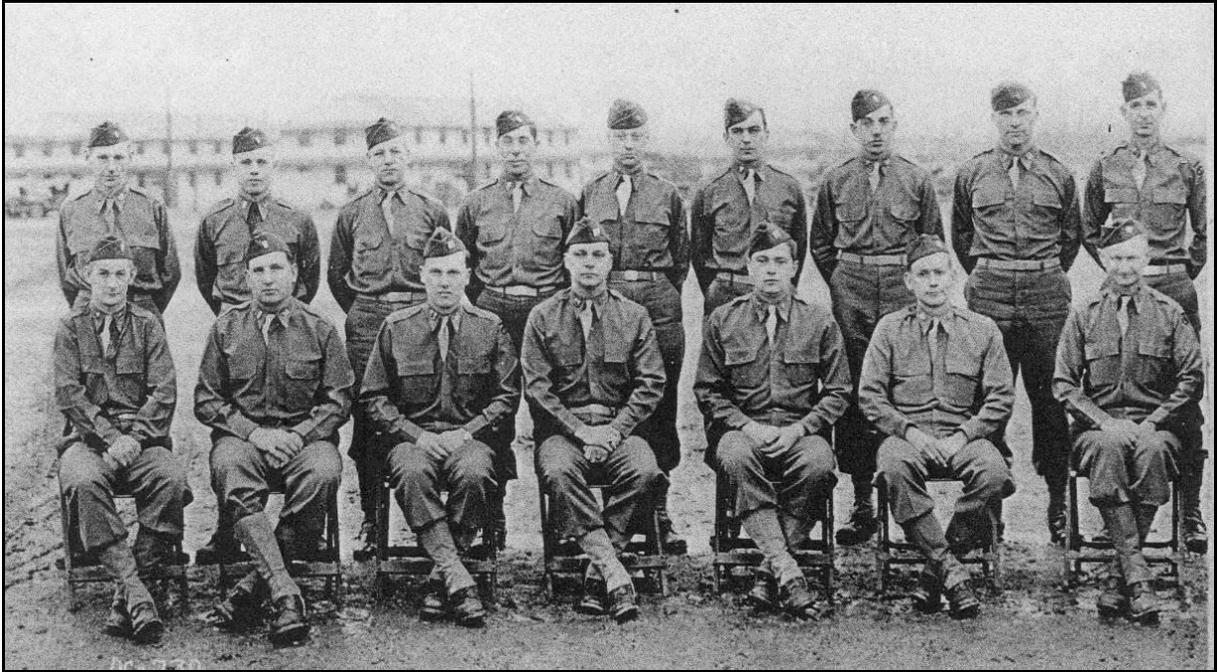
On the morning of 18 February 1944 the division advance detachment had left Fort Dix for the POE. Included were four officers and men of the 315th Engineers who were to make preparations for the battalion's arrival overseas.

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 4 March, 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.

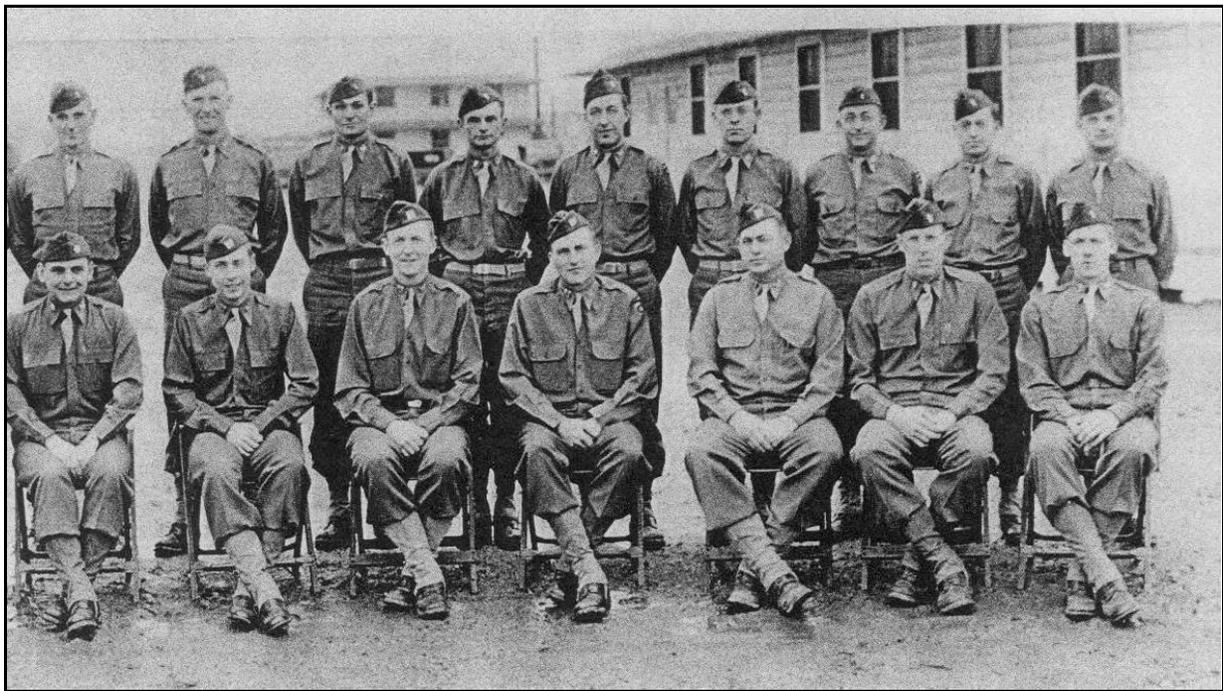
A new convoy was forming on 28 March and the "John Ericsson" was floated again to sail at 1030 for a second attempt at crossing the Atlantic.

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, (CO) Capt Evans, Maj Gilchrist, Maj Tabor



**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. Debarkation 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 were 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.

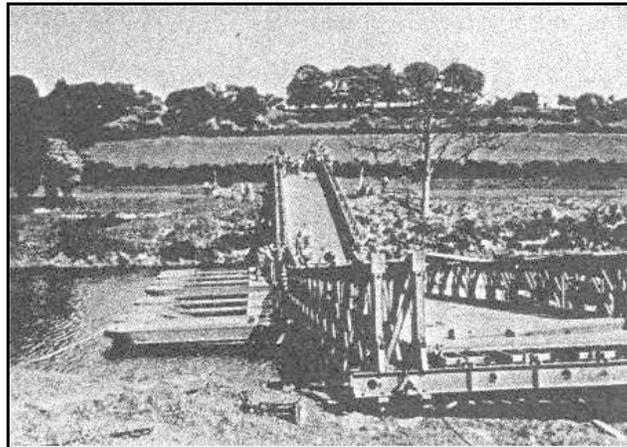


Figure 4-1

## **Normandy**

### **6 JUNE 1944 27 JULY 1944**

During the first week in March, officers of the advance detachment had been briefed on the invasion operation. In the "Bigot for Neptune" room at the King Edward school in Bristol the plans for the employment of the division and the 315th were being made. On the large scale map models, the assembly areas were selected and initial missions were planned. Then as "D" day approached, and the "Bigot" room was moved to Heath Camp at Cardiff, other officers were briefed and map sets and orders were assembled.

Now, aboard ship, the briefings were extended to the company and platoon levels and the preparation phase was ended. Next would be the real thing.

The short voyage across the channel was a weird affair in many ways. On some of the ships the public address systems played the latest recordings from the Hit Parade while the men basked in the warm sunlight and played cards for the new French "invasion money". On another ship the men crowded the rail to watch a running battle between a destroyer and a German submarine. But regardless of the diversionary activities most thoughts were on the job, which lay ahead.

As the convoys anchored off shore the sight was indescribable. In the chill of the dawn as far as one could see the ocean was infested with ships. [Figure 5-1, Figure 5-2] There were battleships, liberty ships, luxury liners converted into transports, landing craft and even former yachts, river boats, tugs and barges. All were loaded to capacity with men, equipment and supplies. The battle wagons were firing round after round of high explosives into the coastal fortifications on the Isles de St Marcouf. In the sky the air force was busy with the Luftwaffe. Burning ships could be seen in the distance and frequently a flaming plane streaked downward and crashed into the water.

Then the LCVP's pulled alongside; cargo nets were lowered and the men in their gas impregnated clothing with their packs, life belt, weapons and tools and other equipment scrambled over the sides and down into the pitching and buckling little landing boats. Even before the craft thudded ashore and dropped their front doors the litter and debris of war could be seen in the water and on the beach. [Figure 5-3] Overturned boats, shell shattered jeeps and personnel belongings were strewn over the sands. A floating body, another grotesquely half covered in the sand and still others lying in rows covered with blankets – like men in formation for drill – this was war for the 315th.

Get off the beach! [Figure 5-4] Keep moving inland! Have you seen anything of Company K? Where are we on this map? Where is the CP? Where are the front lines? Yet – amid the confusion the units moved inland – across the inundated area, past the smashed gliders, past the bodies of airborne troops still hanging by their parachute shrouds in the trees, down the hedgerow banked, equipment-littered roads to the assembly areas.

A portion of Company C hit the beach on D-Day with the 359th Infantry but the main body of the company was on the Susan B. Anthony, which struck a mine and sank off shore within two hours on the morning of 7 June. Only one man was injured. After being picked up by a mine sweeper, then transferred to a British destroyer, thence to an LCT the troops got ashore and joined the advance party with the 359th Infantry in the vicinity of Beuzeville-au-Plain. The company had been attached to the 359th infantry and the regimental team was in turn attached to the 4th Infantry Division for the assault phase. So, Company C was the first unit of the 315th to see action, first to draw blood from the kraut and also first to sustain battle casualties.

By 1245 on 8 June the marching parties of Companies A, B and H & S had waded ashore and were on the march to the first bivouac area ¼ mile west of Adouville-la-Hubert and near the town of Ste Mere Eglise.

The battalion aid station was established with the CP and the aid men were integrated into the platoons of the lettered companies where they were to perform heroic services during all of the battles,

which lay ahead. Vehicles were unloaded on top of the lighter craft and shuttled to the beach where the drivers waded them ashore, performed essential de-waterproofing and drove them into the beach to join their units. The reassembly mission was practically complete when the first field order was received from division on 9 June.

The 90th Division will attack! This phrase, which was to be heard over and over again during the next eleven months of combat, signaled the beginning of the pay off for which more than two years of preparation had been made.

Initially the companies were attached to their respective combat team regiments. Company B saw its first concentrated enemy action on 10 June in an ill fated attempt to destroy a bridge over the Douve River on the division's left flank. After advancing practically unopposed for about one mile west of Chef du Pont, the 1st platoon, with a platoon of the 358th Infantry emerged from the walled protection of the high root-reinforced, earth-banked hedgerows on to a causeway over the inundated flood plain of the river. At the south end of this fill lay the kraut held village of Beuzeville la Bastille, and just short of the village was the masonry bridge to be destroyed. Boldly the troops advanced in the bright sunlight and all seemed unusually quiet until suddenly a flare was fired from a building followed by the crack of a kraut sniper's bullet and then a barrage of heavy machine gun fire. The position on the causeway was untenable in face of the Wermacht firmly emplaced in the stone walled buildings overlooking the bridge. Efforts to place our artillery fire on the defenders failed when the observer's radio was shot out. The men lay prone in the grass and water as fire raked the area and Company B suffered its first combat casualties. Slowly, as on the infiltration course at Barkeley, the men recoiled from the shock of the withering blast. Gradually, under the continuing heavy fire, the men crawled to the shelter of the hedgerows. There, the mission was changed and the platoon dug in, emplacing its machine guns and bazookas to repulse any enemy attack.

Meanwhile, in other portions of the division sector, other units of the battalion were clearing mines, [Figure 5-5] constructing access roads for the infantry supply vehicles, dragging burned out vehicles and dead animals from the roads and breaching hedgerows so that tanks and tactical vehicles could move from one tiny field to another. The headquarters reconnaissance teams were engaged in charting the roads, trails and bridges in searches for clear routes for the advance. The S-2 and ADE sections procured and distributed 42,000 maps. Three water supply points were operated. The S-4 Section built an improvised shower unit at Chef du Pont and opened it for use by all troops in the area. The S-3 Section prepared and distributed information bulletins on new types of German mines, which were being found. The motor section manufactured 2400 mine signs. Division forward CP's were dug in by bulldozers before occupancy. Houses to be used as CP's were checked for booby traps and throughout the division zone camouflage discipline was checked and corrective measures recommended.

During these days dawn came about 0400 and darkness seldom settled over the damp clammy countryside before 2300. The nights seemed to be only short interludes during which the German reconnaissance planes could roam. The one, which always came over just after dark, was dubbed "Bed Check Charlie". The unsynchronized moan of his motors was unmistakable and drew the fire of every weapon on the beachhead. The skies were filled with the criss-crossing of tracers but on the ground the apple orchards and narrow lanes were filled with the high rate staccato fire of the burp gun and the crack-whiz of the "88".

In a violent battle on 10 June, Company A moved with the 357th Infantry in an attack on Amfreville, which continued for two days until its capture on the afternoon of 11th. Here advances were measured in yards and each tiny field, grazed by machine gun fire and pocked by mortars, took its toll. The regiment suffered heavy casualties and after repeated attacks and counterattacks on the next village of Gourbesville, Company A was assigned the mission of separate attack on 13 June. The company moved up behind a predawn barrage but at 0500 just outside the town heavy machine gun and mortar fire caught the company moving through an orchard. Five were killed, three were wounded and the

company was forced to defend its position. Further attacks with elements of the 357th Infantry on the 14th were unsuccessful! And the action resulted in five additional, men killed and 14 others wounded in Company A. Finally, on the 15th Gourbesville fell. At 0900 on 16 June Company A was released from attachment.

The first replacements, a group of 99 men, joined the battalion and the individuals were assigned to the various companies. Kitchen trucks arrived with the rear echelon detachments and the first mail from home was received. The battalion had withstood its baptism of fire and was now set to fight or work and often do both at the same time to clear the way for the 90th.

Mine and debris removal continued as the number one engineer problem and this work assumed gigantic proportions when after days of shelling and bombing the town of Pont l' Abbe was taken. Tons of rubble was pushed from the streets to open them for traffic. Mines and dud shells were collected and detonated and then again the engineers were off for an infantry mission.

Another division had cut the Cotentin Peninsula and the drive on Cherbourg had begun. To prevent the Germans from leaving or entering the peninsula the 357th Infantry, with Companies A and B of the 315th Engineers (attached on 22 June) moved by motor to the general line Neuvilleen Beaumont to Hamefax. Here the engineers installed road blocks and mines, manned outposts along the escape routes and incidentally discovered a cleverly camouflaged "V bomb" launching site. Company B was relieved on the 27th and Company A on the 29th. As these companies were released they moved with Company C and H & S into a battalion assembly area near Groult to prepare for the next action -- an attack to the southeast.

On 2 July the drive was launched and the battalion engaged in the normal mission of clearing mines, debris and blocks from the roads and trails as the infantry pushed forward toward Pretot, St Suzanne, St Jores, Lithaire and the Foret de Mont Castre. Progress was slow. Every foot of ground was fiercely defended by fire or by mines or by both; and it was in a narrow sunken trail near Pretot that the first major equipment casualty occurred.

A tank had hit a mine, was disabled and blocking traffic. Mine detectors had been used to search the area and many tellermines were removed. Then the H & S Company D-7 dozer was brought in to open a bypass around the tank. No one will ever know exactly what happened. The explosion was not that of a single anti-tank mine or of even several anti-tank mines but was more like the detonation of a large cratering charge. The mighty D-7 was thrown over on its side and its bottom torn out. A tread was crazily wrapped around the superstructure and the driver tossed off into a field and seriously wounded. The kraut was taking a heavy toll in equipment too.

Nearby a platoon of Company C was removing mines and booby-traps. A passing soldier set of an "S" mine seriously wounding three of the engineers.

The division was fighting desperately at Beau Coudray and on the slopes of Hill 122. The German army was making a furious counterattack trying to break through and hurl the invaders back into the sea. Again the engineers went into the line. First Company B was attached to the 358th Infantry at 1200 on 7 July and moved into a defensive position on Hill 122. Then at 2400 the entire battalion was attached to the 358th Regiment and moved to Hill 122 and the Foret de Mont Castre. Here, amid the ruins of the fortress, Camp de Cesar, (built by the roman emperor over 2,000 years ago) the battalion fought alongside the 358th Infantry as the provisional battalion mortar platoon [Figure 5-6] was moved into position to repulse attack after attack. Composed of a squad from each of the lettered companies and equipped with six captured 80mm mortars the "engineer artillery" laid down barrage after barrage from a well stocked, captured, Kraut ASP.

On July 11th the attacks were beaten and the infantry launched a successful drive moving forward through the dense underbrush of the forward slopes of the Foret. Engineer casualties had been 5 killed and 18 wounded when, at 0930, the battalion was released from attachment.

Over a month of fighting had passed since the beach landings. Now, atop Cesar's fortress on Hill 122, it seemed that the division had fought at least halfway across France. But on that morning of 11 July the sun broke out and as the swirling mist lifted, even without binoculars, one could see the white sands of the Utah Beach beyond the weird lovely lowlands of stately moated chateaus and rich flowering pastures.

Craters, mines, knocked out vehicles and dead cattle blocked the roads. As the division pushed forward the engineers worked day and night to clear the way. By the 15th of July the river Seves was reached and the division halted briefly for reorganization.

Now the river Seves is not a large river. In fact, in America it would probably not even have a name and surely would not be called a river. Yet, this brook with its wide grassy marshes had been carefully developed as a formidable obstacle by the Boche. Machine guns to graze the meadow, 88's and panzerfausts to cover the destroyed bridges – all had been well dug in and camouflaged. Time and time again the troops assaulted the positions and time and time again a sheet of impenetrable fire was placed along the Seves. All night long the artillery roared overhead. Both the "incoming" and "outgoing mail" rumbled over the orchards like fast freight trains speeding through the night. Never before had the units been subjected to, or delivered to the enemy, such sustained masses of fire.

It was only after 10 days of fire and counter fire that the German position was softened but then a strong counterattack appeared to be developing and Company B was rushed into a position astride the main north-south road to Periers. Here at St Patrice de Claidis the company dug in, sighted its weapons and ran its telephone lines to the outposts. But the attack didn't develop and on 27 July the division broke through the kraut defenses. Companies B and C spanned the Seves with steel treadway sections near St Patrice de Claidis and at St Germain sur Seves.

The race was on!

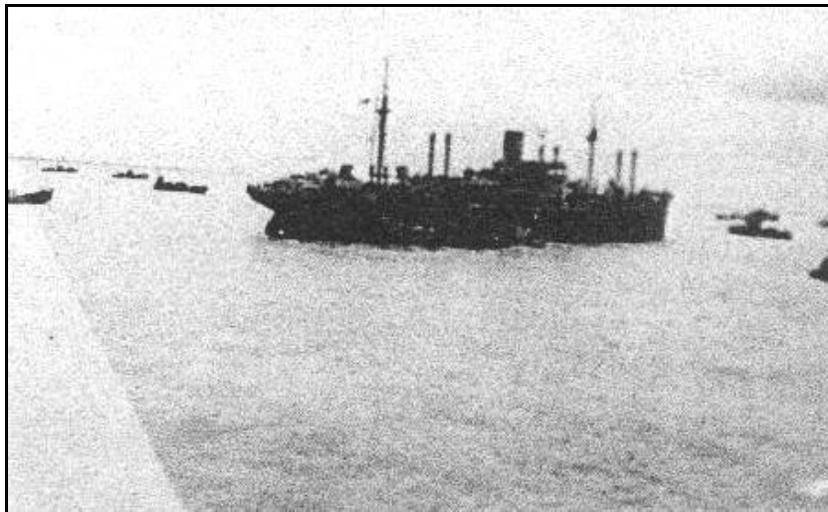


Figure 5-1

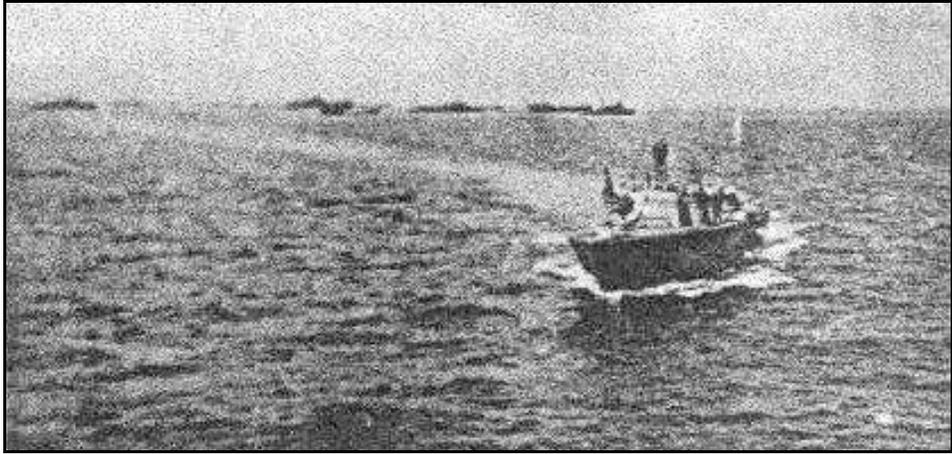


Figure 5-2

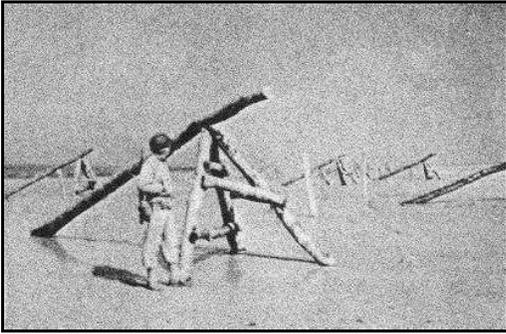


Figure 5-3



Figure 5-4



Figure 5-5



Figure 5-6

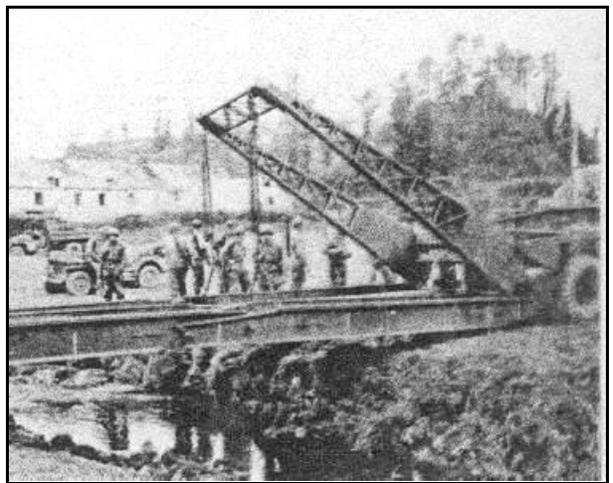


Figure 5-7



Figure 5-8



Figure 5-9

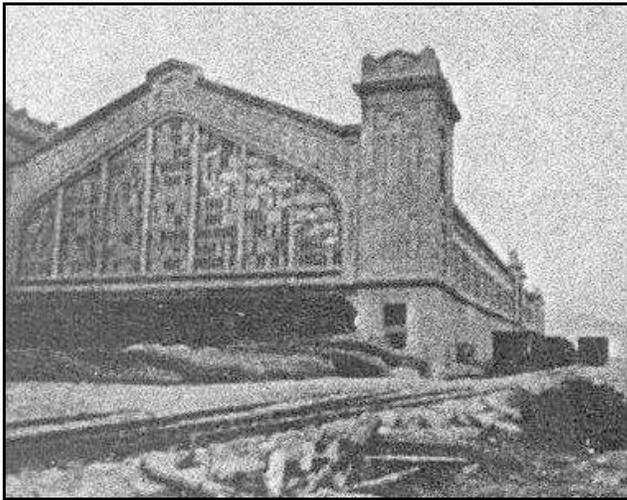


Figure 5-10

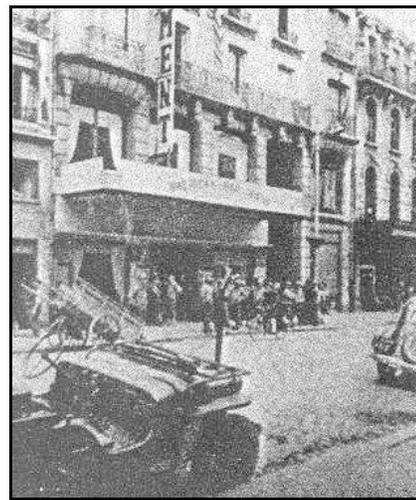


Figure 5-11



Figure 5-12



Figure 5-13

## **Northern France**

### **28 July 1944 5 January 1945**

First there were great numbers of craters, burned out tanks, mines and demolished culverts and during 27- 28 July the battalion suffered seven casualties – mostly from mustard pot mines. But as the way was cleared through Periers, St Sauveur Lendelin and Countances the going became easier until the Selune River was reached at St Hilaire du Harcouet. Here on the night of 3-4 August Company C built the battalion's first major bridge of the war.

The road was fine, a paved highway along which the division was to roll, but over the Selune River there was a 110 ft masonry arch bridge which had been demolished. Two-way traffic was required. With Company B assisting in the repair of the approaches, Company C began the simultaneous construction and launching of two double single bailey bridges. The structures were unusual in that cutaway abutment seats were made so that the decking was level with the roadway. Work was continuous throughout the night except for a period of 45 minutes when the area was attacked by the Luftwaffe. At 0130 the first parachute flares were dropped and as they floated downward their burning magnesium charges lit up the entire area like daylight. Anti-aircraft guns fired wildly first at the flares and then at the sound of the planes. But around and around the planes droned and then at 0215 made the bomb run and dropped their pay loads. With the long swoosh and the unmistakable earth shaking blast the bombs hit. Had they been on their mark the results would have been devastating but the anti-aircraft fire and perhaps other factors caused the bombers to miss their target. The sticks fell harmlessly in the nearby fields and the only casualty was one man hit by an ack-ack shell fragment. Work was quickly resumed and the bridges were completed well before the deadline.

The 90th rolled on! The citizens of St Hilaire stood in the streets and cheered and waved and yelled. Troop laden trucks and jeeps were pelted with bouquets of flowers and the men were presented, ceremoniously, with wine and cider and Calvados. On and on the 90th rolled. On through Landivy, Louvigne du Desert and Ernee – it was the same in every town and village. Here was Monsieur le Mayor in his cutaway stripped pants – waving frantically for quiet so he could make his speech. At times the welcoming committees seemed unhappy because the troops wouldn't stop long enough to receive the keys to the city formally.

To Task Force Weaver, Company A was attached on 5 August. This now famous team made a 37 mile dash to Mayenne where engineers of the 1st squad of the 2nd platoon of Company A removed the German explosives from a key bridge over the Mayenne River. Under direct fire these soldiers dashed over on the bridge, clipped the firing wires and defused the huge aerial bomb charges with which the krauts were trying to destroy the massive stone bridge. Later in a flanking movement Company A ferried the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 357th across the river and the entire city fell.

Again the division was rolling along – out of the hedgerows, out of the stench of the war torn bocage country and across the plains of Northern France. Rolling so fast that the water points leap-frogged each other – sometimes twice a day three or four small scale map sheets were crossed without stopping.

Each company moved with its CT regiment clearing vehicles and mines, repairing a few craters but mostly rolling along at top speed across France – chasing the kraut.

At Le Mans a bridge over the Sarthe was captured intact on the 10th. The battalion was already constructing a floating bridge just north of the city and both were used to speed the division in a drive northward.

Le Mans was the first large city to be liberated by the 90th and the French welcome surpassed all previous ones. Flowers, eggs, cognac, cider, tomatoes, wine and bread were offered and frequently tossed to (and sometimes tossed at) the troops by the hilarious Frenchmen. Here the mademoiselles were even better than before, simply because there were more mademoiselles. There were the bearded

Frenchmen who insisted on bestowing wet whiskery kisses on the cheeks of each and every American who came within his range. But the mademoiselles were shy and coy yet not too shy and not too coy.

But Le Mans was soon left behind. The battalion with the division had rolled 140 miles since breaking out of the hedgerows, much by-passing of German columns had occurred and many head on collisions had resulted in sharp, road junction battles where the perfectly coordinated troops battered down the heavily armored German forces. Now the 90th was surging northward in a move to seal off the retreating Boche armies.

The lettered companies were moving with their respective CT's and the units swiftly liberated Alencon and Sees. Then moved on to Nonant-le-Pin and into an area to become famous as the Falaise Pocket.

German columns were desperately trying to escape. The engineers built and manned road blocks and especially at a road junction just east of Le Bourg St Leonard the 2nd platoon of Company C engaged in very heavy fighting on the 17th and 18th against repeated attacks by panzer columns. The frenzied attempts to break out were stopped on the 19th, Company C, with the 359th Infantry, moved into Chambois to make contact with the Poles and British of the north. In the other regimental sectors Companies A and B were engaged in the same type of operation and the trap was sealed.

Never before had such a mass of destruction been seen. The artillery had a "field day" as thousands and thousands of rounds were poured into the trapped armies. Desperately the Germans beat themselves against the sides of the wall that engulfed them but the 90th Infantry Division held fast. Prisoners poured into the cages. Guns, equipment and vehicles beyond number littered the valley floor.

It was with enthusiasm that the engineers moved in to clear paths through the wreckage. By 1800 on the 19th Company C, with assistance from the tankers and TD's, had cleared from the streets of Chambois: 26 burned out tanks (including 5 mark VI's), 203 vehicles and 63 dead horses.

For several days the clearing of roads continued but primarily it was a sort of ghoulish picnic for the men who spent much time scrounging among the vehicles for trinkets and for the prized P-38's and lugers. But the mission was accomplished and it was time to move on. The engineers had played another important role in the division's operations. In this one, in four days, the 90th had captured 13,000 prisoners. Killed another 8,000 of the enemy and had destroyed more than 300 enemy tanks, 250 self-propelled guns, 164 artillery pieces, 3270 vehicles and countless other items of enemy war material.

All American dead and most of the German bodies had been collected but by the 26th of August, a week after the trap had been sealed, the stench of a thousand dead horses and the general carnage of the battlefield in the warm summer heat was terrific.

Morale was high as the victorious 90th again loaded up and rolled to the east. On and on – through Mortagne, Chartres, Etamps, Milly and Fontainebleau – more than 160 miles in one day. Tactical maps were out of the question and road maps (carte michelin) were generally used. Corps maps were so far behind that essential prints were flown up and dropped for distribution.

After an overnight bivouac in the great forest of Fontainebleau, where kings of France had hunted and played at their summer palaces, the battalion pushed on. Crossing the Siene at Montereau on 27 August the 315th less the CT platoon attachments assembled at Nangis then pushed on toward Montmirail and to Dormans on the Marne.

The French resistance forces were saving many bridges from destruction by the rapidly retreating German forces. However, in this area most large bridges were temporary structures and they were easy to destroy. In fact in many places the bridges had been destroyed by the retreating French in 1916-17 then rebuilt again. At the beginning of World War II they had been destroyed again by the French, rebuilt by the Germans and now they were destroyed by the Germans to be reconstructed by the American engineers. Everywhere Free French were eager to help. They had spotted mines and assisted in their location and removal. They helped procure bridge repair materials and helped in reconstruction work. But near Dormans the gap in the span across the Marne was too great for expedient repairs.

Company A built the battalion's assault boat and rubber float bridge and the division rolled on to the cathedral city of Reims in the Champagne District in the heart of France.

Reims, which had been devastated during World War I, fared this one much better. The airdrome had been heavily bombed and some of the bridges in the center of the city had been destroyed. But the wide boulevards, the sidewalk cafes, the supplies of champagne and the famous cathedral were unscathed. In spite of the light enemy resistance the dash across France suddenly came to a halt. The famed Third Army had run out of gasoline. It was on 31 August 1944 that the battalion halted near Bourgoyne on the outskirts of Reims. They had stretched the supply lines beyond their elastic limit.

Company A engaged in bridge repair work in the city and elements of Company A and Company B repaired bridges along the Aisne River near Pontavert on the division's left flank. The main task, however, fell to Company C.

Before the 90th could roll again gasoline had to be supplied. So, Company C moved to the Reims airdrome and turned themselves into aviation engineers for a week. Runways were cleared of mines and repaired and soon C-47's were roaring in with loads of petrol flown directly from bases in England. The stock of that rare and precious commodity was built up to such an extent that on 7 September the division and the battalion rolled again.

The route was to the east – on through the still pock marked World War I battlefields near Ste Menehould and at Verdun. But again the supply lines snapped as the division halted at Etain then slowly pushed on to the outskirts of the fortress city of Metz and to the Moselle.

At Briey, a huge cold storage warehouse filled with choice beef for the Wermacht was liberated. For the first time since in the hedgerows, where the fine Norman cattle had stepped on tellermines, the battalion had choice t-bone and sirloins.

Immediately plans were made for an assault crossing in the vicinity of Thionville but a continuing bad supply situation forced a long deferment of this operation.

By 14 September the mission had definitely become a defensive one. The heavily armed ancient fortresses of Metz were strongly manned. Two platoons of Company C and one platoon of Company A were attached to task force Randolph. The mission was to hold the center of an enemy salient in the Foret de Jaumont and during the ensuing action the battalion suffered eleven casualties from mortar and artillery fire. The engineer mortar platoon was again brought into action and, from a quarry near Malancourt la Montagne, round for round was traded with the kraut.

The major portion of the battalion moved into the Bois de Fleury near Beaumont on 15 September and the next day the rains came. For twelve days without stop the downpour continued. An early fall had come to the Moselle and with it had come a stalemate.

Strong patrols probed the fortress outposts. In slugging matches, while in support of the 359th, Company C suffered 10 casualties at Gravelotte on the 26-27 September. On 3 October a jeep and trailer load of mines exploded near Pierrevillers killing seven men of Company A.

Continuing rains and the heavy traffic turned roads and trails into ribbons of mud and turned the battalion bivouac, in Bois de Fleury, into a wooded bog. For almost two months the engineer battle was conducted from this – "Fort Quagmire".

Road work was of first importance but other projects quickly developed. A mockup of a portion of Fort Jeanne d'Arc was constructed for practice assault work. Then a tank transported moat bridge was fabricated. Experiments with the conger, the snake and large shaped charges were conducted in a captured Maginot Line section west of Thionville.

As the cool rains of autumn gave way to the cold rain and wind of winter the battalion dismantled a large number of prefabricated hutments in the Maginot area. After hauling them into the regimental zones they were erected behind the front lines near Doncourt and St Marcel for use by the infantry and in "Fort Quagmire", the prefabs rapidly replaced the rain soaked pup tents.

Camouflage of the huts built for the infantry was a difficult problem. In "Fort Quagmire" the falling leaves left bare the rooftops and the vehicle parks. The garnished nets had been the old standby against aerial observation but here the problem was much greater. Again materials from the Maginot Line were employed. Various types of wire netting with clay and metal garnishings were effectively used. Furnishings such as beds, tables and chairs and even items from Hitler's own suite in the vast underground Maginot city were brought up and moved to complete the barracks of "Quagmire".

One particular, much traveled, section of a road south of Gravelotte was subject to clear observation by the Germans in one of the casemates of the Metz fortress system. The krauts seemed to have enough ammunition to shoot at any vehicle which ventured down the racetrack during daylight but not enough to shoot indiscriminately without a clear target. So, to deny this perfect observation Company B turned itself into a forestry company and cut hundreds of evergreens from the Bois de Ognons. Then, under the cover of darkness, the engineers replanted the trees, with guy wire supports, forming a screen all along the road. It would be good to have known the surprise of those German gunners when they looked across their field of fire the next morning and saw a new forest that had "grown" overnight.

Except for a violent 27 day battle for Maizieres-les-Metz the division zone was a stalemate of mud punctuated by the exchange of fire by combat patrols and the occasional duel of artillery and mortars. But on 1 November a relief of the 90th began. By the 3rd all units of the battalion had moved again to the vicinity of Fontoy and Angevillers just west of Thionville. The assault of the Moselle, which had been first planned in September, was on. Metz would be encircled and the 90th would drive across the German frontier into Naziland.

Days were filled with planning, preparation and rehabilitation. Nights were filled with movement of troops and equipment being juggled into position for the assault. Two battalions and other units of the 1132nd Engineer Group would support the operation. The 315th would ferry a portion of the assault troops, furnish engineer support on the far shore and construct a foot bridge and a light raft. The corps engineers would ferry the other assault troops and build the heavy bridges and rafts.

The Moselle was 350 feet wide at the selected crossing sites of Cattenom and Malling. Normally the bridging of such a stream would not have presented any insuperable problems, but as D-Day approached the steady downpour of rain continued. Assembly areas were turned into impossible bogs of mud where supply trucks sank to their axles. Foxholes were turned into deep pools of icy water and as the hour approached - still the rain poured down.

0330 on 9 November was H-Hour. The 359th Infantry crossed on the left at Malling and the 358th crossed at Cattenom - across the wild Moselle - angrily foaming, swirling and eddying as it reached then passed, flood-stage.

Surprise over the enemy had been gained but violent reaction soon came from the German artillery and mortars, already "zeroed in" on the crossing sites, directed from the ancient Prussian Fort Koenigsmacher, and in spite of the artificial fog created by generators and smoke pots the fire was murderously accurate. A single salvo hit and severely damaged five truck loads of bridging.

Still, the rain poured down and the Moselle swiftly spread to 400, then 600 and then 800 yards - out across the flood plain - eight times the normal span. pontoons were ripped from their moorings and were washed downstream. Boats carrying supplies were capsized and only those with large motors could stem the tide.

A bridge at Malling (although the approaches were under 4 ft of water) was under construction on the 11th but a well placed mortar burst deflated several floats. The bridge capsized and was swept downstream in the swirling current. Amphibious trucks were brought in but only a few were able to battle the raging torrent and these were mired up in the mud banks or disabled by submerged antitank mines on the far shore.

Power boats and liaison planes were the only means of transportation as the troops savagely fought on and captured fortress Koenigsmacher and repulsed counterattack after counterattack.

On the night of 11-12 November two tank destroyers crossed the reconstructed bridge at Malling but the raging torrent, in one mighty blast, swept the bridge away and scattered its remnants 800 yards downstream.

Then the river passed its crest and began to subside – first at a rate of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch per hour, then as rapidly as it had risen, it receded. On the fifth day the Moselle was bridged. At Cattenom the tanks and artillery rolled in a steady stream – uninterrupted only when the receding water allowed some of the floats to come to rest on previously submerged mines. Mines had been numerous in the hedgerows of Normandy but never had the 315th encountered such deliberate minefields and antitank defenses as the enemy had prepared here east of the Moselle. Along a 12 mile band parallel to the river hundreds of thousands of mines had been installed – mines of all types. There were Schuh mines designed to amputate a foot and there were wooden box Mines to blow off a jeep wheel. There were Hungarian mines, Italian mines and there were glass mines and asphalt mines, which the detectors could not detect. Of course there were huge numbers of the now very familiar tellermines and "S" mines.

But in spite of the "hell and high water" the old 90th slugged on and with the 5th Division closed the pincers around Metz, and on 19 November the fortress city fell. Of the operation, General Patton, Third Army Commander wrote to General Van Fleet, Division Commander:

"The capture and development of your bridgehead over the Moselle River in the vicinity of Koenigsmacker will ever rank as one of the epic river crossings of history. Please accept for yourself and pass on to the officers and men of your valorous division my high commendation for the superior manner in which you and they preformed this truly magnificent feat of arms."

There was no halting to gloat over the fall of the fortress – Metz. For the sacred soil of the "Vaterland" was now only a few kilometers ahead.

Using great numbers of slave laborers the enemy had dug miles of huge antitank ditches across the countryside in this frontier area between the Saar and the Moselle. The ditches were opened across the roads and trails as well as the highways. Then on the principal routes hasty timber bridges had been built over the ditches to carry the retreating traffic. In the face of our advancing infantry these structures were blown and the "Engineers War" ground on as the 90th crossed the boundary into Germany.

The international frontier was marked only by small monuments on some roads, but on the highways the remains of blasted port of entry stations saluted the invading Americans.

The country didn't look much different. The civilians looked about the same although the houses and the towns seemed cleaner and neater. But now, instead of the troops pitching pup tents in the mud, the German civilians "gladly" moved out of the best houses in town so the invaders could be sheltered.

Over the Nied River at Niedaltdorf an almost unopposed "assault" river crossing was staged. The infantry was ferried across, then the 315th built its floating support bridge and a corps battalion moved up and constructed a double-triple bailey. Company B then pushed a bailey across the Nied at Kerprich Hemmersdorf. The 90th pushed on and patrols reached the Saar on 19 November 1944.

After the successful completion of the Moselle crossing the Saar looked like it could be a cinch – a cinch if it weren't for the fact its opposite shore boasted one of the thickest sections of the famed Siegfried line.

Enemy observation of the few possible crossing sites was perfect and his prearranged artillery fires were precisions of accuracy. Furthermore, as on the Moselle, the Saar was approaching flood stage.

The 6th of December was the assault day and again, in the cold foggy pre-dawn hours, the 90th silently moved by assault boat and caught the enemy unaware.

Portions of Companies A and B crossed with their respective regiments to fight and do engineer work amid the Siegfried fortifications – Company C built a footbridge near Wallerfangen, which stayed in just long enough to allow reinforcing troops to cross – then a well placed round of heavy mortar fire neatly clipped the bridge and the bridge and the wreckage went swirling down the stream.

Again, the supporting corps engineers moved in to construct heavy rafts and a bridge but, as at the Moselle, the flooded river, smoke dissipating winds and deadly accurate fire blocked every effort. Bridges were started and rafts constructed but the accurate fire knocked out each one. The infantry fought to capture then recapture the pill-boxes of Dilligen and Pachten and the 315th brought over welding equipment to seal embrasures of the captured forts.

All supplies were carried across in boats at night and the wounded were brought back on return trips. At a site between the two on which the enemy had been placing such accurate fire, a ferry was finally put in operation and a trickle of armor and tactical vehicles began to cross. The trickle continued and on the 15th armor supported infantry stormed and took Dilligen.

Then Suddenly the picture changed. To the north the Von Ronstadt offensive had broken through the American lines in Belgium and Luxembourg.

Engineers of the 315th began installing mines and booby traps in Dillingen as preparations were made for the evacuation of the 90th's Saar bridgehead. On the 19th Company A built a footbridge near Buren and the withdrawal began. For three days and nights the operation continued and under continuous shelling all troops and all except six destroyed vehicles were withdrawn by ferry, foot-bridge; and assault boat and so the "double-crossing" of the Saar was completed. The Siegfried Line had been cracked and another triumph was almost achieved but the fortunes of war demanded that the 90th move elsewhere.

Christmas of 1944 was spent in the Maginot Line area near Veckring. Here the 315th was deliberately preparing a defensive zone along the front of the Siegfried switch position from Sierck-les Bains through Manderen, Launstroff and Waldwisse to Mondorf. Bridges were prepared for demolition, craters were charged, trees were fixed for easy felling across roads and mines were emplaced. But the 90th could not long be spared for a defensive mission and on 5 January orders were received – "be prepared for movement".

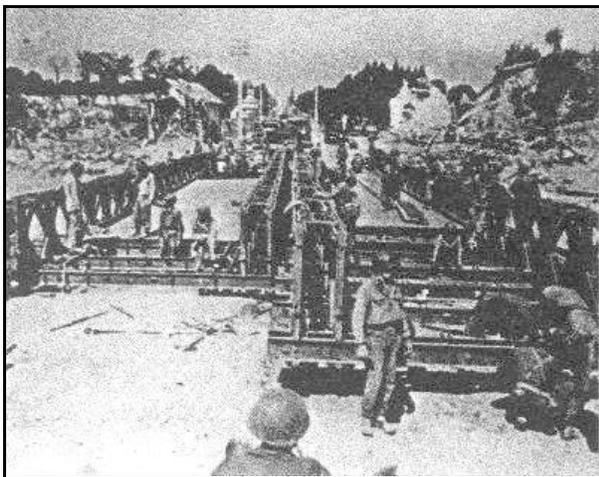


Figure 6-1

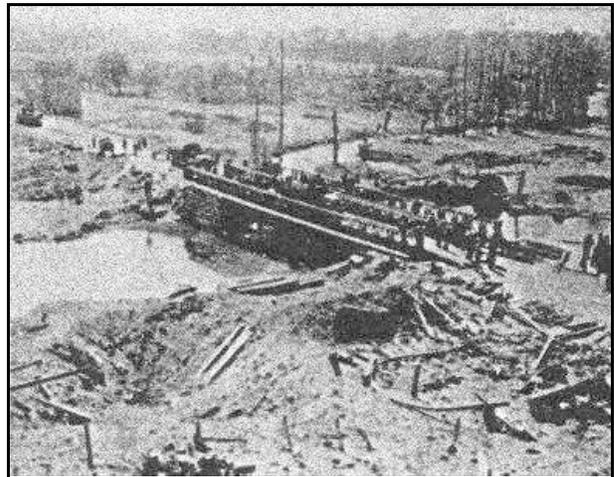


Figure 6-2



Figure 6-3

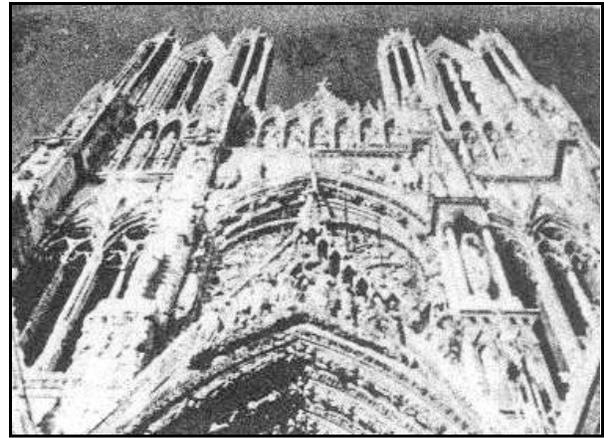


Figure 6-4

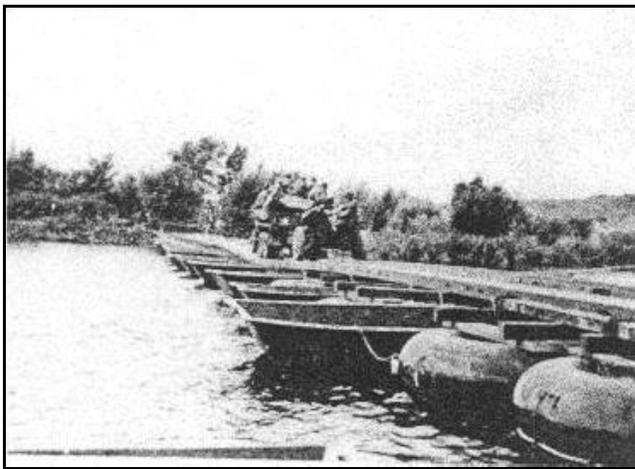


Figure 6-5

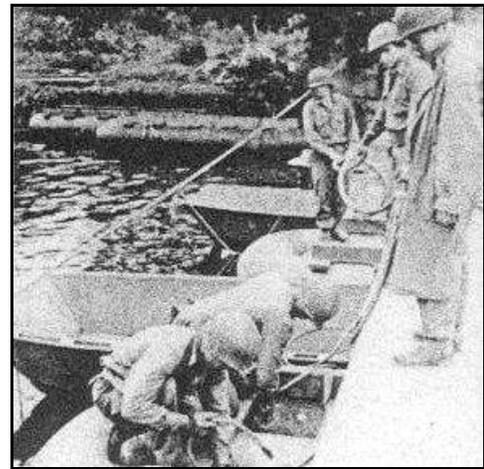


Figure 6-6

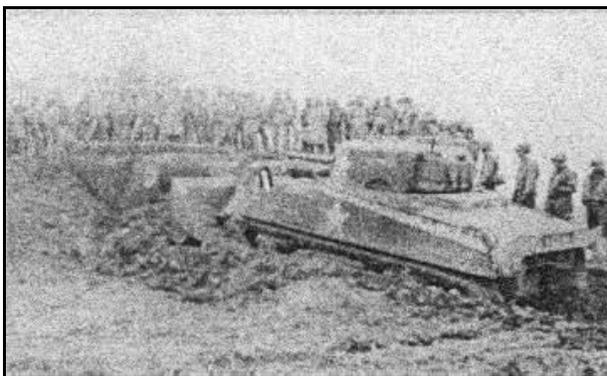


Figure 6-7



Figure 6-8

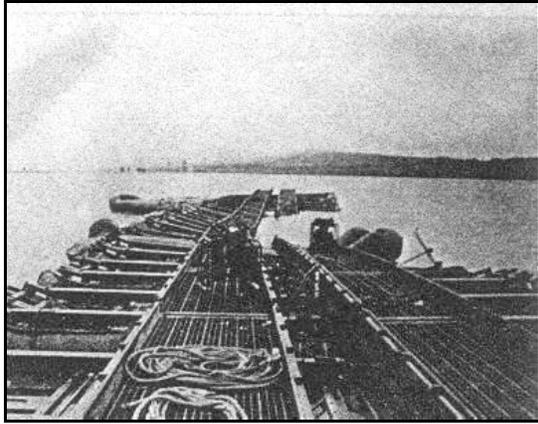


Figure 6-9



Figure 6-10

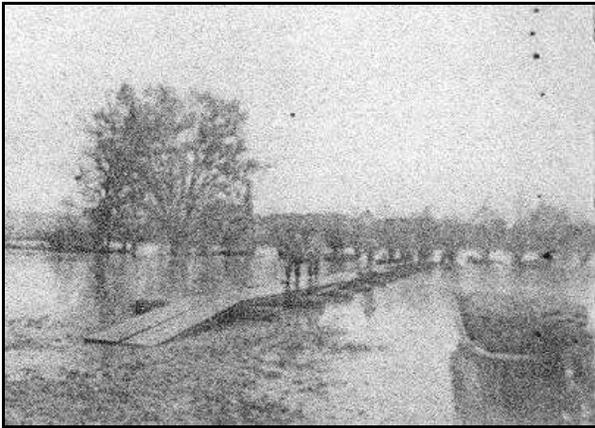


Figure 6-11

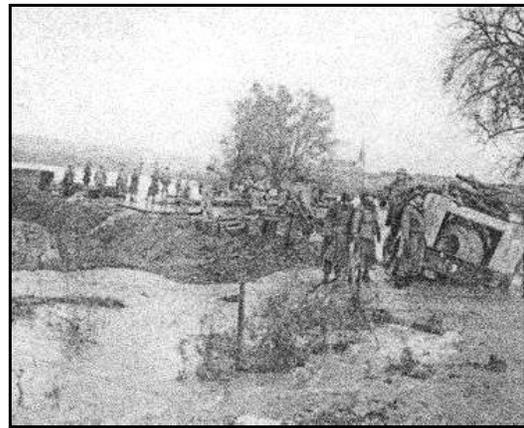


Figure 6-12



Figure 6-13

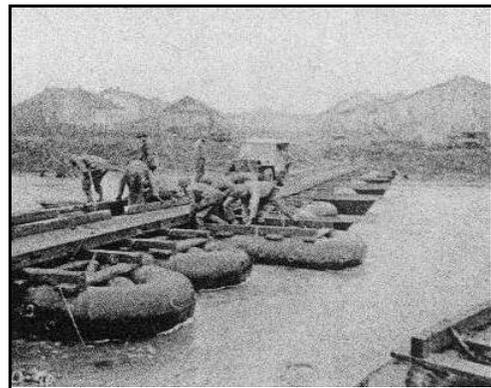


Figure 6-14

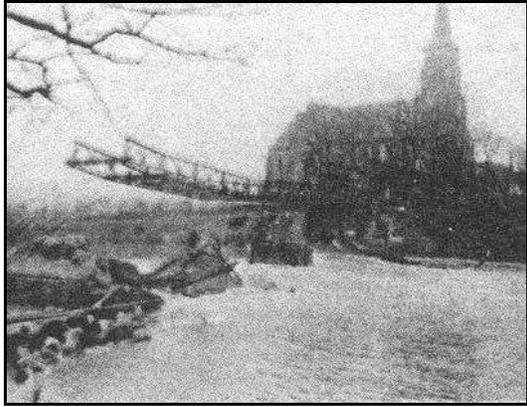


Figure 6-15

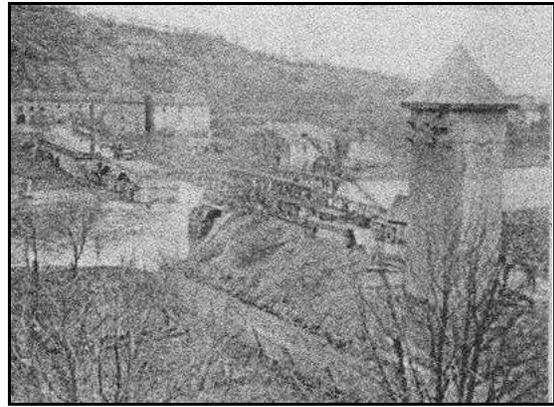


Figure 6-16

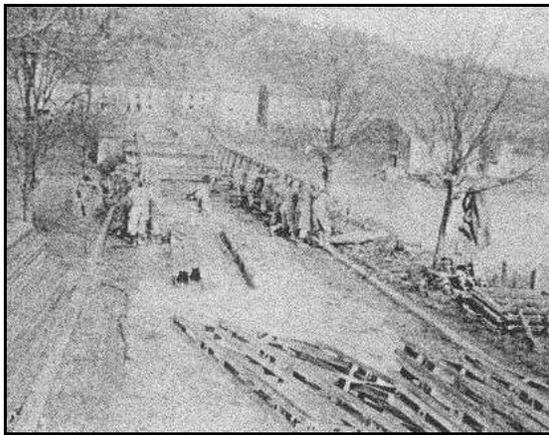


Figure 6-17

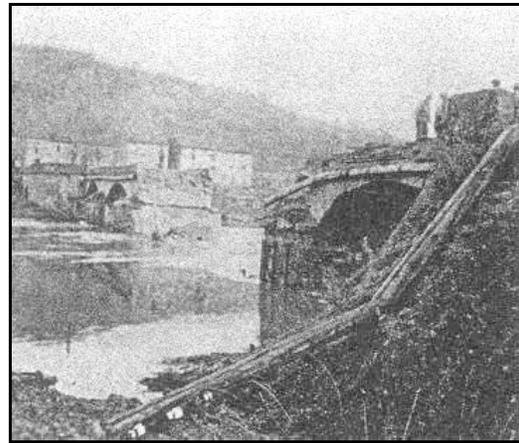


Figure 6-18

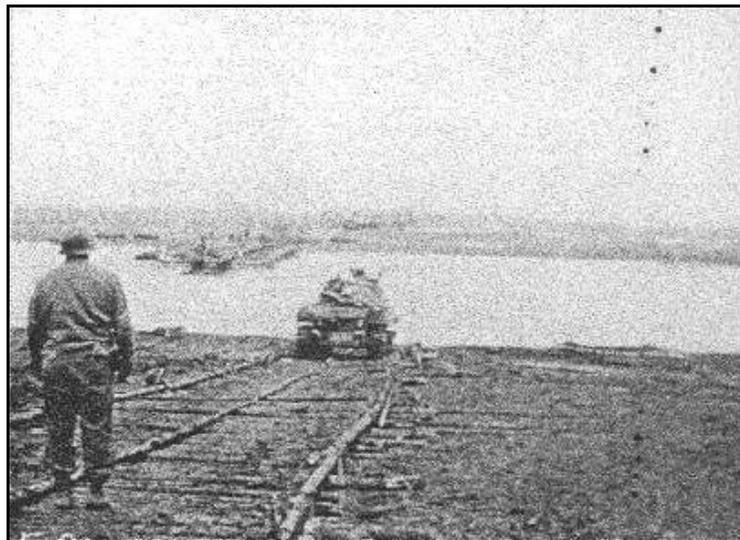


Figure 6-19

## **Ardennes**

### **6 January 1945    2 March 1945**

The ground had frozen solidly. Five inches of snow had fallen. A glazing of ice had formed on the highways as the 315th loaded up to head north through a raging storm. All vehicular identifications were painted over and shoulder patches were removed. TO insignias on helmets were covered with tape and the 90th moved 50 miles, anonymously, through the storm.

Backtracking across the Moselle the troops again crossed at Cattenom. The scene was different this time for the snow and ice had covered the wreckage and cars of that November assault. The treadway bridge, protected by several anti-craft batteries, lay peacefully across the, now tame, Moselle.

Swinging to the north the battalion rolled through the muffled silence of the snowstorm. Into Luxembourg at Eurange, on through Luxembourg city then west through Arlon, Belgium, then north again the troops rolled in the near-zero weather.

On 9 January the 90th was in place, ready to assault the enemy east of Bastogne, and again it found the weather definitely pro-nazi. On the icy grades, trucks skidded and plunged into ditches. Tanks spun their tracks helplessly and high winds, sweeping down the valleys and across the ridges, drifted the snow into cuts along the roads.

Bulldozers were used for snow plows and captured German V plows were mounted on the bumpers of 4 ton trucks. [Figure 7-1] The engineers worked day and night spreading gravel on the ice-covered grades and curves and plowing off the drifts in a mighty effort to keep the roads open. Near Herlange, hundreds of spruce and fir saplings were cut and piled to form snow fences at strategic points along the MSR.

As the infantry pushed on, snow covered mines became an ever increasing problem. Some were American mines emplaced by troops which had been overrun by the sudden thrust. Others had been hastily thrown in by both Americans and Germans during the see-saw battles which had ensued – now they were all well buried under the snow and ice of winter in the Ardennes. In the sub-zero blizzard the engineers searched and probed for mines as the 90th hurled the kraut back into "der Vaterland" and into the Siegfried Line.

For the first time the 315th was clearing, from the roads, large numbers of blasted and burned American tanks and vehicles. In the heart of the "bulge" the Sherman tanks and the tigers had slugged it out. Many jeeps and weapon carriers had been overrun and burned and everywhere there was a mixture of abandoned equipment – both American and German.

From a local factory the battalion procured a hundred pair of skis and set up a sled manufacturing business. Platforms were built and runners attached to form carriages for the infantry to use in hauling ammunition, rations and the wounded over the snow and ice covered hills.

Back into Luxembourg on 20 January, Company C and Company A built baileys over the Trione near Asselborn and Sassel. On the 25th the C.O. of Company B was seriously wounded when his jeep struck a snow covered box mine on a narrow trail between Sassel and Tois Verges near the Tois Verges Monastery.

The infantry was rapidly pushing forward in this area of wandering international boundaries where one had to carefully watch his map to tell whether he was in Luxembourg, Belgium or Germany.

On 31 January the 315th staged the assault crossing of the Our river between Burg Reuland and Steffeshausen – for the third time, a flooded stream plagued the engineers. [Figure 7-2] An early thaw was developing. Above freezing weather was now melting the ice and snow and the Our leaped out over its flood plain. Baileys were built at Burg Reuland and a Peterskirche and no sooner than they were completed – the floodwaters lashed at the footings. Rubble was hauled, sand bags were filled and the Burg Reuland bridge was saved. But the Peterskirche bailey was toppled into the torrent.

The 90th was across, however, and smashing its way again into the Siegfried Line – this time in the vicinity of Heckhuscheid, Habscheid, Brankscheid and Grosskampenberg. [Figure 7-3, Figure 7-4] Division headquarters moved to Winterspelt and the battalion CP was established at Elcherath on 9 February.

Mines, which had been frozen into insensitivity now thawed. On roads, which had been carrying heavy traffic, trucks were being blown up by the thawing mines and in the rear areas the corps engineers worked feverishly to remove these bypassed weapons.

The 315th Engineers joined the infantry teams in blasting the forts with satchel charges as the 90th steadily drove through the fortifications. But again the supply situation caused a temporary halt, the mission became a containing one, yet violent artillery and mortar duels were a daily occurrence. Cutting timber from the "orchard type" pine forest the 315th assisted the infantry in improving their positions by constructing log covered shelters and OP's.

During the entire month of February the 315th fought the mud battle. Supporting corps engineers worked hundreds of civilians and finally the MSR situation became so bad that rails and ties were removed from the ballast and the railroad grade was converted into a one-way road between Burg Reuland and Hemmeres.

On 24 February the 90th was relieved and pulled out for a brief rest and rehabilitation. The 315th H & S Company motor section had been working at Elcherath, on a portable shower unit. A captured gravel-spreading trailer was converted into a firebox. Boiler tubing was cut and welded to form the heating coils. An atomizer was fabricated to blow diesel fuel into the chamber and captured fire pumps were used to force water through the heater. After several trial runs and modifications the unit was set up on the Wintermpelter branch near Heckhalenfeld just south of Winterspelt. Three hospital ward tents and stoves were borrowed and through these shower and dressing tents poured a steady stream of battle weary troops. The QM provided clean clothes for all and soon the entire division had been refitted for the next battle, which was sure to come.

Preparations for a final thrust through the Siegfried were made for the 90th knew that the assault could not be much longer delayed. On 2 March it struck – smashing through the remaining forts, dragons teeth and pillboxes and during the night 2-3 March Company B bridged the Prum at Pronsfeld with a bailey. The west wall was cracked wide open and in the process the division had captured and destroyed over 500 pillboxes and log bunkers, had captured 3,195 prisoners and had knocked out 38 tanks and SP guns.

The 315th filled many of the larger forts with tons of captured explosives and ammunition. Then it detonated the charges, which in a mighty blast, destroyed the fruits of years of German planning and the work of thousands of slave laborers who had died in the construction of the impregnable Siegfried. But the major tasks of fort destruction and mine removal were left to the corps and army engineers as the 315th plunged on with the 90th on into the Rhineland.

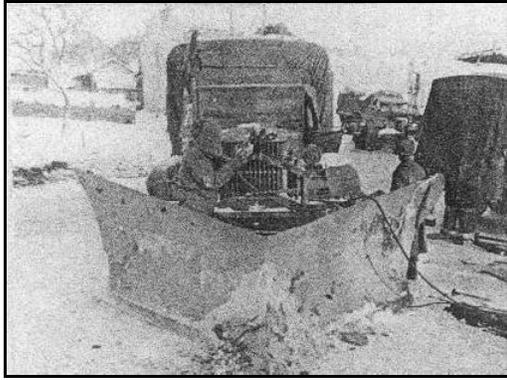


Figure 7-1



Figure 7-2



Figure 7-3



Figure 7-4



Figure 7-5

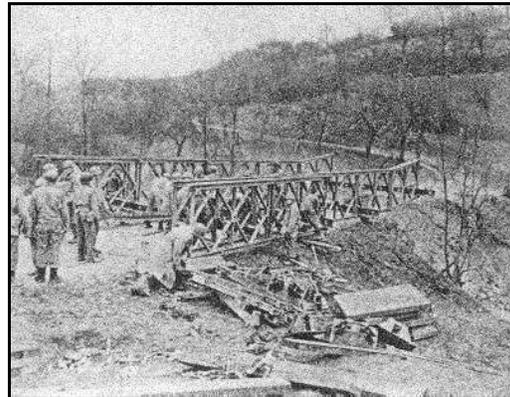


Figure 7-6

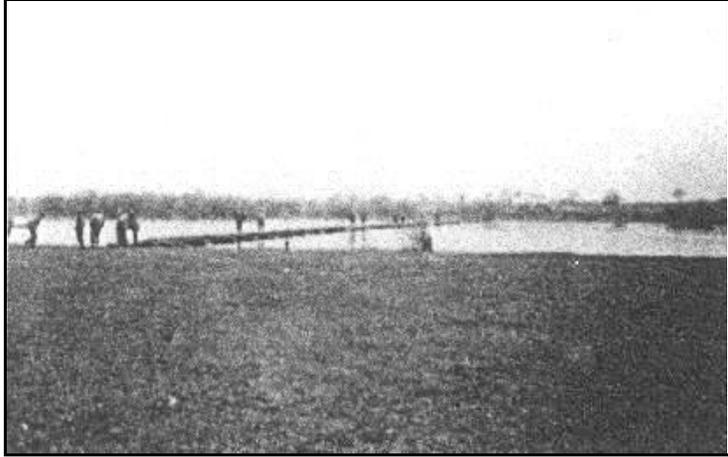


Figure 7-7

## **Rhineland**

### **3 March 1945 27 March 1945**

Through the Eiffel, the 90th smashed on to reach, on the 5th the Kyll River over which all bridges had been destroyed. Company A, under fire from a not too secure bridgehead, constructed a floating support bridge at Birresborn then built a plank road across the flood plain on the far shore. On the night of 6-7 March, Company B constructed a bailey across the Kyll at Lissingen.

While in the Brandschied – Habscheid – Winterspelt area experiments had been conducted in the production of artificial moonlight with anti-aircraft searchlights. Here on the Kyll the experiment paid off. Three of the giant arc lights placed several miles away were trained on the low hanging clouds then adjusted by radio and telephone so that the optimum amount of light was reflected from the clouds over the bridge site.

The laden bridge trucks were difficult to move through the mud and heavy traffic and it was almost midnight before they arrived. Company B was already in Lissingen and the men had hit their "sacks". But as soon as the first load of panels arrived the company was up and on the job. The artificial moonlight gave just enough illumination to make work with the bridge parts possible yet not enough to permit observation by the enemy who was only a few hundred yards away. At first work was slow then as the "moonlight" was better adjusted and the men became accustomed to the semidarkness the bridge rapidly took shape. It was finished by dawn – well before the deadline for an armored division to pass through. The last real defense line west of the Rhine was broken.

The 90th was rolling again as it had across Northern France. On the 9th the 315th cleared abandoned vehicles and equipment from 40 miles of roadway as the 90th roared into Mayen astride the principal route to Koblenz on the Rhine. On to the Rhine was the watchword, but the famed 90th, the masters of river crossings, were diverted to the southeast to again assault the Moselle.

After three days of reconnaissance and planning the boat crossing was made at 0230 on 14 March 1945 in the vicinity of Hatzenport, Brodenback and Burgen. Supporting corps engineers were to do the major bridging and ferrying on the site of the civilian ferry at Hatzenport. Initially the resistance was light but as the troops scaled the almost vertical vineyard-covered valley wall the enemy stiffened. After daybreak, as the infantry pushed out on to the plateau, the resistance became fanatical and the krauts threw in everything in a final effort to save the forces west of the Rhine.

Support rafts were operated to carry over light tactical vehicles and later a heavy ferry took armor across to support the hard pressed infantry. That evening a treadway bridge was completed by the 150th engineers and on the next day the 4th Armored Division roared across to spearhead the push to the Rhine at Boppard. When compared with the November crossing at Cattenom this second assault of the Moselle had been a cinch.

A large portion of the 315th was bivouacked in Hatzenport for three days during the bridging operations. Hatzenport was a beautiful little town nestled at the brink of the Moselle between the steep sides of the valley. These sharply terraced slopes were literally solid masses of vineyards. The entire population of Hatzenport was engaged in the wine industry. There were huge underground warehouses filled with thousands of bottles of the finest vintages of Moselle wines and champagnes. Naturally there was much sampling and comparing of these products and when the battalion loaded up on the 16th to move to Mermuth at least one platoon commander found that it was necessary to dump some of the samples in Order to get his ammunition and tools aboard.

It had been presumed that the 90th would force an immediate crossing of the Rhine but suddenly the direction was changed. The division stampeded 30 miles to the southeast and crossed the Nahe River between bad Kreuznach and Bingen on 19 March. Scattered mines, knocked out or abandoned

vehicles littered the roads leading into the city of Mainz. The engineers were fighting to clear the routes of their respective combat teams and task forces.

The assault on the stronghold of Mainz began 22 March and with each of the six attacking infantry battalions and engineer team moved forward to clear mines and debris from the streets. Bitter house-to-house fighting was expected but the capture developed into a “snap”. The disillusioned civilians were eager to hoist a white flag, to help clear the streets of debris and to help locate mines. All went well until, in the 359th sector, a booby trapped mine killed one and seriously injured two other engineers of Company C.

While the 90th was clearing the remaining resistance from Mainz, the 5th Division crossed the Rhine between Oppenheim and Nierstein. The 90th had missed assaulting the greatest of the European rivers but quickly, on the heels of the 5th Division crossed on the 22, 23 and 24th to expand the bridgehead, capture Darmstadt and drive 19 miles to the outskirts of Frankfurt.

On 27 March the battalion CP was set up in Bierber just outside of Offenbach. Here plans were rapidly made for still another assault crossing. This time the Main River at Muhlheim between Frankfurt and Hanau. A thrust would be made into central Europe.

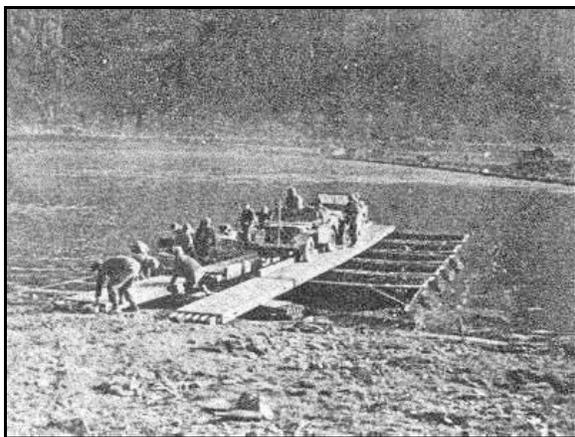


Figure 8-1



Figure 8-2

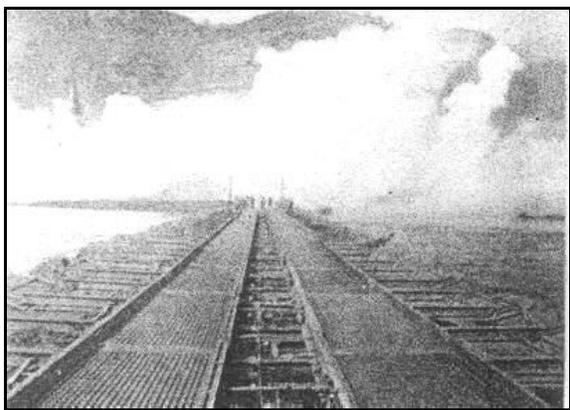


Figure 8-3

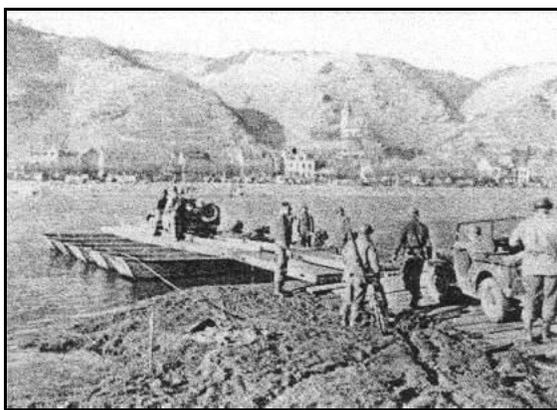


Figure 8-4

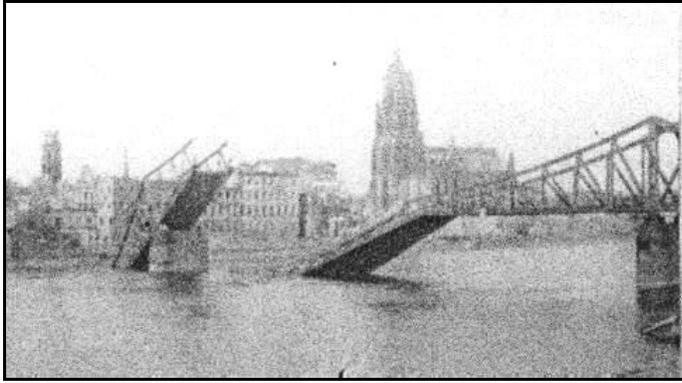


Figure 8-5



Figure 8-6

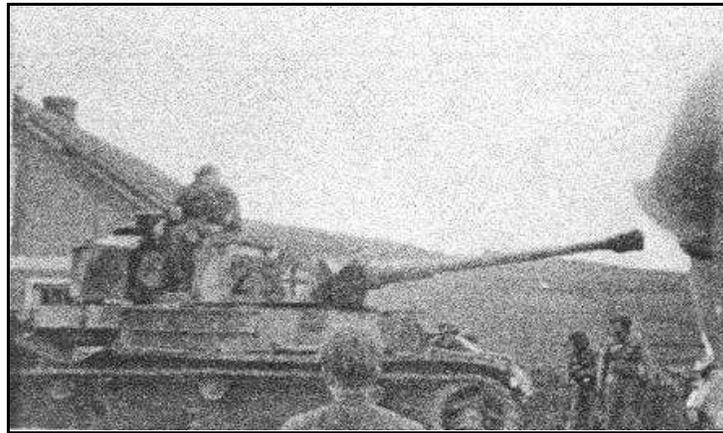


Figure 8-7

## **Central Europe**

### **28 March 9 May 1945**

In the streets and alongside the levees of Muhlheim the assault boats were laid out in the darkness. The 315th was supporting the 358th Infantry while just downstream at Rumpenheim the 150th Engineers were making similar preparations for the 357th Infantry. As the assault hour 0330 on 28 March approached all was unusually quiet along the riverfront. Boats were carried over the dikes and silently launched into the stream. The infantrymen were loaded, paddled across and the engineers returned the boats for the second, then the third loads. Still no shot had been fired. Then, as the first light of dawn dimly illuminated the fog rising from the river there was a brief but violent firefight with a detachment of Hitler Youth OCS cadets in the village of Dornigheim. Small arms fire raked the crossing sites as Company C rapidly pushed out and completed a footbridge. Artillery fire from batteries in the Taunus Hills on the northern outskirts of Frankfurt bracketed the area but the work went on.

The 359th Infantry streamed over the footbridge and then Company C built support rafts and carried the tactical vehicles across. The corps engineers were soon at work on a heavy pontoon bridge at the Muhlheim-Dornigheim ferry site. By mid-afternoon the bridge was complete and the 6th Armored was roaring across. In less than twelve hours two regiments had been ferried over in assault boats, a third crossed on a footbridge, tactical vehicles had been rafted across and now armor was streaming over and into the heartland of Germany.

On 30 March the division advanced 25 miles, the next day 30 miles. Town after town displayed the white banner of surrender and nowhere could Nazis be found. The German civilians were all peace loving people who had always hated Hitler and his crowd and who loved the Americans passionately. There were a few road blocks but the civilians were eager to help remove them. Many of the great masonry arch bridges on the autobahns had been demolished but most could be bypassed. On and on – it was the same each day – a few skirmishes, a few roadblocks and bypasses, but mainly it was a matter of racing on into the hills of Hessen.

On 1 April one of the H & S Company reconnaissance teams was captured while reconnoitering a bridge site near Heimboldshausen the team later escaped and on 3 April bridges over the Werra River were built at Widdershausen, Dondorf and Vacha.

This area of Germany was a mining and manufacturing center and it was at Merkers in a salt mine that the 90th captured the entire German gold reserve. One hundred tons of gold bullion and millions of dollars in currencies of many nations were captured along with priceless art treasures which had been looted from the art centers of Europe. The 357th Infantry was detailed to guard the treasure while the main body of the division pushed ahead to Bad Salzungen where a large group of German diplomats were captured in a very plush hotel overlooking a crystal lake.

The bridge across the Werpa at Bad Salzungen was captured intact and the demolition charges were removed. But as the 90th pushed on a fourth bridge over the Werra was built between Immelborn and Barchfeld as the division raced on into the mountains of Thuringia amid a solid stream of liberated slave laborers.

At Zella Mehlis on 9 April the Walther small arms factories were captured. It seemed that there were enough pistols and shotguns and rifles there, in various stages of manufacture, to have completely armed several divisions and needless to say, most of the visiting Americans helped themselves from the stocks of completed weapons.

This rugged country was ideal for a determined defender. The mountainous roads could have been cratered or mined and hundreds of bridges could have been destroyed but instead only a few abatises blocked the way. The 90th moved on 10, 20 and sometimes 30 miles a day.

At Hirschberg, near the great hydroelectric reservoir, the Saale-Stau See, a bailey was built over the Saale. At Blankenstein a floating bridge was pushed across and the division rolled on.

Hof fell and elements of the division, duly accompanied by photographers and press correspondents, crossed into Czechoslovakia on 18 April 1945. The 90th had been the first to slice completely across the German nation. Turning now to the south and moving parallel to the Czech western border the division slashed on through Marktredwitz, Tirschenreuth and Neustadt where a bailey was built across Waldnabb River on the 23rd

This was near the huge Wehrmacht training center of Graffenwohr and a few of the diehards (perhaps from the school) made a last ditch stand behind abatis in which antipersonnel mines had been placed. This sudden return of mine warfare caused several engineer casualties but soon the division had slashed on through this zone.

The infantry had liberated American prisoners of war at Fuschmill and at Flossenberg a huge concentration camp was captured. Here the bodies of former inmates were stacked like cordwood awaiting transportation via a special inclined rail car down into the furnace ovens.

On 4 May the entire German 11th Panzer Division surrendered unconditionally to the 90th. Moving in their own 700 odd vehicles Germans moved in under the white banner, were disarmed and set up in their own PW cage.

On the next day the division turned again into Czechoslovakia to open the Regen pass through the mountains, to allow the 4th Armored to rush through, then motorize and make a dash for Prague. Vast forests lined the roads and the winter's snow still capped the places along the route through Zwiesel to Suscice as the division pushed through the Sudetenland. A few trees had been felled across the road, a few mines had been scattered on top of the paving and near Ludwigsthal. A bridge over a swift mountain stream had been demolished. The gap was quickly spanned with a bailey and the advance continued only to be halted suddenly on the morning of 7 May. A message of historic importance was being relayed to all units! The German high command had signed an unconditional surrender.

With the battalion CP and H & S Company at Mestys Zelezna Ruda, and the lettered companies with their respective combat team regiments still deeper in liberated Czechoslovakia, the combat history of the 315th Engineer Battalion ended – a history which began on the beaches of Normandy and wound through one thousand miles of hedgerows, craters, mines and road blocks and rubble, across eleven major rivers and countless minor streams – the 315th Engineers had cleared the routes half way across Europe and stood triumphantly at last facing the Russians on the liberated soil of Bohemia.



Figure 9-1

## Conclusion

There is little to add to the story of the 315th Engineer Battalion. On 9 May, the official "V-E Day", the entire battalion assembled in Zwiesel then on the 14th it moved back to Weiden where it was to renovate the Metzerkaserne.

The next day the first contingent of "high-point" men left for the US and home. Thus began the slow, then rapid, disintegration of the battalion under the redeployment plan.

Russians, (liberated PW's) had moved from the Weiden cage into the barracks of the Kaserne and now the cage was filled with the fallen Wehrmacht – after much haggling and many delays the Russians were moved out and the 315th fell to the task of completely renovating this German military post. Using German PW laborers the brick buildings were scrubbed from top to bottom. Tons of rubbish, loot and trash were hauled to the dump and burned. Hundreds of window panes were replaced, roof tiles installed and then the inside walls were completely repainted. Utilities were repaired, new furniture was brought in and elaborate company kitchens were arranged in the basements of the barracks. A fine motor park was paved with brick and a complete theater installation was constructed in an armory-type building. The Kaserne was rapidly becoming a first-class garrison post.

In June the major work was completed and the 315th together with division headquarters, the Reconnaissance Troop and the Signal Company moved into the Kaserne – the finest installation that the battalion occupied during its three and a half year history.

There were routine road repairs in the division zone and there were construction projects at the Weiden and Flossenberg PW cages but most of the work was taken over by civilians and PW's under engineer guard and supervision. At the Kaserne, PW's and civilians took over many of the housekeeping duties for the troops.

There were retreat parades in the quadrangle, award presentation ceremonies, calisthenics at reveille and considerable unauthorized fraternizing "after fours".

For one special ceremony, the battalion, at "present arms" lined the street into town while General Patton rode into the Kaserne to review the troops and deliver a victory message.

But this garrison life was not to last long. In late June the trickle of redeployment became a stream and in July and August it became a torrent. All of the "old men" of the 315th were transferred to units scheduled for early return to the states and "low point" men from all over the third army area arrived to take their places.

Within a few months there was almost a complete turn-over in personnel and although the 315th remained in Weiden until November, its history to those who knew it best, ended in August and September 1945.

With other units of the 90th the battalion was shipped to the states and deactivated in December 1945, and in 1947 a completely new version of the engineer battalion was activated as a reserve unit in San Antonio, Texas.

No written history can possibly describe the invincible spirit of the men who fought and labored in the ranks of the T-O Engineer Battalion. This brief history may have described some of their deeds, it may help its members to recall other gallant actions, but no words can possibly give sufficient honor to those men who served under the red and white shield which bears the inscription – "Fabricamos"

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F. G.

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