

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 1110 ENGINEER
 COMBAT GROUP'S OPERATIONS IN THE ETO

25 Aug 1945

Ever since the initial assault of the Normandy Beaches, the German Armies have been dealt a number of tremendous blows which have sent them reeling towards the Rhine. The crushing knockout blow which followed the epic crossing of the Rhine destroyed completely the last vestiges of the once powerful Nazi military machine. These rapid, unparalleled military achievements have been accomplished with the fine cooperation of all arms of the service. The 1110 Engineer Combat Group throughout the Normandy Campaign and the succeeding Allied thrusts through France and Belgium and finally into Germany, has played a unique part. Although not committed as a front line unit, its many varied and highly important missions materially contributed to the Allied might.

The 1110 Engineer Combat Group was organized from the 49th Engineer Combat Regiment at Camp Carson, Colorado, on 1 April 1943, under the command of Colonel Peter E. Bermel. Following maneuvers and prior to embarking for overseas, the Group was commanded successively by Major Frederick L. Matteson, Jr., Lt Col Frank J. Forney, and Lt Col Daniel S. Spengler.

The Group, under the command of Lt Col Spengler, arrived in the United Kingdom at the harbor of Liverpool, on 6 January 1944. The first permanent station in England was at Pangbourne, Berkshire, where the Group remained until 17 January 1944, at which time it moved to Sonning, Berkshire. During its stay in England, the Group undertook special training in Bailey Bridges. Problems in erection and removal of bridges under all kinds of weather conditions, both day and night, were given to all units. Training on road construction and maintenance emphasized the use and maintenance of power equipment. Mine training was extensive and thorough. At this time, the units attached operationally to the Group were as follows: 148, 207, and 300 Engineer Combat Battalions, 631 Engineer Light Equipment Company, and the 989 Engineer Treadway Bridge Company.

The 1110 Engineer Combat Group, attached to VII Corps, landed on Utah Beach, Normandy, France, in two increments, 11 and 17 June 1944, and was immediately assigned various engineer missions. The principal mission was to open Highway 14 through Carentan as soon as possible. One of the attached units of Group, the 300 Engineer Combat Battalion, despite constant mortar and small arms fire from the 6th German Parachute Regiment, succeeded in laying a minefield Southeast of Carentan in front of the 101 Airborne Division's main line of resistance.

An important achievement of the Group during this phase, was the construction by the 300 Engineer Combat Battalion of a Class 70, 80 foot timber trestle bridge East of Carentan, France, which served as the main connecting link between the Utah and Omaha Beaches. At all times during the construction, the bridge site was under heavy, accurate artillery fire, which necessitated frequent reconstruction of sections of the bridge.

During the construction, in addition to numerous casualties among the work parties, Major John E. Tucker, Commanding the 300th Engineer Combat Battalion, was killed by enemy shell fire.

On 17 June 1944, Group was attached to VIII Corps. On 21 June 1944 it was assigned a defensive sector North of the Douve River, just South of St Saveur Le Vicomte. This mission involved the commitment as front line troops, of the 148th Engineer Combat Battalion, to prevent attacks from the South in the vicinity of La Haye du Puits, during the main drive north to Cherbourg.

From 10 to 29 June 1944, units of the Group constructed eight bridges in the vicinity of Carentan, ranging from 60 to 110 feet. These included two Class 70 Baileys, a Class 40 Treadway, and a Class 70 Timber Trestle Bridge.

On 8 July 1944, Colonel Spengler was killed while on an engineer reconnaissance in La Haye du Puits, France.

The 300 Engineer Combat Battalion was relieved from Group control on 9 July 1944 and transferred to another Engineer Group, leaving the 1110th to continue operations with only two combat battalions.

On 11 July 1944, Colonel John T. O'Neill, then Lt Colonel, assumed command of the 1110 Group. On "D" Day, Colonel O'Neill had commanded engineer assault troops, assigned the mission of clearing the beach obstacles. For the courageous performance of this duty, the new Group Commander had already earned the Distinguished Service Cross.

The achievements of the 1110 Engineer Combat Group continued to be most worthy contributions to the major military effort. In addition to its many engineer assignments within the city of La Haye du Puits, the Group shortly thereafter, successfully removed numerous types of mines from a causeway on Highway N-800 and erected a 45' steel treadway bridge over a demolished gap. Thus, the rapid advance of the Sixth Armored Division South through Lessay was made possible. On 28 July 1944, during the construction of the above bridge in the vicinity of Lessay, Major John F. Seeman, Commanding the 148 Engineer Combat Battalion, was killed when he stepped on an S-Mine.

On the 28 of July 1944, the Group became Army Troops by revert to the control of the Army Engineer, First U.S. Army. From this day on, Group supported the forward movement of Corps troops with engineer work, constructing bridges, clearing minefields, and maintaining roads across France and Belgium.

Additional changes in Group units occurred during this period. The 989 Engineer Treadway Bridge Company was relieved of Group control on 29 July and on 1 August 1944 the 164 Engineer Combat Battalion under command of Lt Col Cameron was attached. This brought Group units to three engineer combat battalions and one engineer light equipment company.

During this period, the 207 Engineer Combat Battalion constructed an 88 foot pile bent timber bridge at Tribehou, France, over which a great portion of the Third U.S. Army moved to its assembly area, prior to the push up the Brest Peninsula. At the historic city of St Lo, Group units removed many enemy mines and made considerable road repair because of the large craters caused by the terrific aerial and artillery bombardment. The 148 Engineer Combat Battalion repaired a 135' stone-arch bridge in the town of St Lo at this time.

Beyond St Lo, the major portion of the enemy forces made a hasty retreat, and less engineer work was encountered. Yet, during the latter part of August 1944, the area of responsibility tremendously increased and in some cases amounted to 2000 square miles. As of 1 September, the outstanding achievement during the period was the construction of a 300' Class 35 Heavy Ponton Bridge, and a 306' Class 40 Floating Bailey Bridge, followed by a 340 foot pile bridge, all across the Oise River at Compiègne, France. This work was done by the 207 Engineer Combat Battalion. Another semi-permanent bridge, 270' long, was built in September by the 164 Engineer Combat Battalion across the Meuse River at Dinant, Belgium in 7 days. This bridge was a Class 70 pile-bent, constructed entirely from materials secured locally. During the month of September, Group began the operation of sawmills and quarries and continued with the maintenance of roads, and bridge construction. Efforts were con-

tinually being made to find better methods and materials to patch roads, simplify bridge designs, and to operate sawmills and quarries with greater efficiency.

The engineer skill and experience in combat tactics gained in the previous campaigns were more fully demonstrated during the crucial month of December when Von Rundstedt made his terrific bid to destroy the First Army and turn the tide of war. At this time the Group was bivouaced in the vicinity of Brand, Germany, east of Aachen. Engineer missions were immediately curtailed and preparations were made for a final defense of the area. During the paratroop alert, thorough searches of all homes and fields were made for enemy paratroopers. Road blocks and demolitions were laid to deny the enemy their objectives within the Army area, and battle plans were rehearsed. However, no action outside of aerial bombing and strafing took place in the vicinity of Brand. When Von Rundstedt's forces continued their rapid advance through the Ardennes, the Group made a motor march to the vicinity of Huy, Belgium, to start vital operations in front of the German spearhead. The 207 Engineer Combat Battalion was given a barrier mission to deny the enemy Route N-36 between Dinant and Ciney, Belgium. The Battalion met enemy resistance while placing their initial road block and were forced to withdraw to secondary positions while elements of the US 2nd Armored Division and armored elements of the XXX British Corps moved up to stop the enemy advance. Two Floating Bailey Bridges were built across the Meuse River within 48 hours after completion of the move to Huy, Belgium; a Class 70 by the 148 Engineer Combat Battalion at Amay, and a Class 40 by the 164 Engineer Combat Battalion at Andenne. These bridges were used to supplement the one existing permanent bridge on the Meuse, between Liege and Namur, at Huy, Belgium, and also to allow more rapid commitment of the British XXX Corps to the battle. Two bridges, a Class 40 Floating Bailey and a Class 40 Fixed Bailey were completed at Hamoir by the 207 Engineer Combat Battalion on 24 and 28 December 1944, respectively. These bridges, and a Steel I-Beam, Class 70 Bridge, built later at Hamoir, were important in keeping open supply routes leading to the front.

With the completion of the bridging and barrier missions, units of Group concentrated on applying abrasives to roads in the Group area of responsibility, in order to keep supply routes open in the V Corps area. During the winter blizzards in the heart of the Ardennes. Ice and snow was cleared by means of snowplows, mortar patrols, graders, and bulldozers. In February, after a very severe cold spell, thaw set in, leaving the roads ravelled and full of potholes under the continuous battering by heavy traffic.

The 1264 Engineer Combat Battalion was assigned to Group on the 15 February 1945, thus bringing Group strength up to four engineer combat battalions and one light equipment company.

During February 1945, all of Group's efforts were expended on the repair of road-bed failures. During this month, 22,763 yards of single lane corduroy road was constructed and covered with rock by units of the Group, with the assistance of nearly 8000 troops from other branches of the service attached for this mission. These attached troops were too numerous to mention, but consisted of elements of infantry, tank, and tank destroyer units, all of them doing their job well.

Following the capture of the railroad bridge across the Rhine at Remagen by the 9th Armored Division, on 7 March 1945, the Group's efforts were immediately turned to the construction of mine booms upstream to protect the bridge from demo-

lition by swimmers or floating mines. The 164 Engineer Combat Battalion was assigned the mission of river security, including construction of the mine booms. Work was started on 9 March, but progressed slowly due to high water velocity, constant air attacks, and observed enemy tank and artillery fire on the bridge and the adjacent work sites. During the initial phase of the construction, the 164th suffered heavy casualties, however, six booms of different types were installed. On 9 March and 14 March 1945, Bridge Parks were established in the vicinity of Weilerwist and Liblar, Germany. Shortly after the Remagen bridge failed, a 1200' Class 40 Floating Bailey was constructed by the 148 Engineer Combat Battalion at Remagen in 48 hours.

On the 26 March, one of the most important engineer missions of the entire war was given to this Group - the construction of a Dual-Carriageway Class 40-70 Bailey Barge Bridge, 1180' long, across the Rhine River at Bad Godesberg, Germany. The sections of the bridge were constructed by the 148 and 207 Engineer Combat Battalions, each constructing one half of the bridge. The approach roads, which included moving 30,000 yards of earth, were constructed by the 1264 Engineer Combat Battalion.

These battalions were greatly aided by the 631 Engineer Light Equipment Company, 1368 Engineer Dump Truck Company, and the 329 Harbor Craft Company. On the 6 April 1945, the bridge was opened for traffic and named the Hodges Bridge in honor of Courtney H. Hodges, Commanding General of the First Army. The bridge carried the army's heaviest loads and normal traffic flowed over the bridge at the rate of over 6,000 vehicles per day.

After the completion of the Hodges Bridge, the Group moved across the Rhine into Central Germany doing routine engineer work until the cessation of hostilities.

At the time of the signing of the peace with Germany, the Group was stationed in the vicinity of Eisenach, Germany. Upon return of First Army Headquarters to the United States, Group came under the control of Ninth Army, and continued with routine engineer work on roads and bridges over a large assigned area.

During this operational phase, due to redeployment of troops both to the States and to the Pacific Theatre, the number of units attached to Group varied constantly and were too numerous to mention. The 148 Engineer Combat Battalion was transferred from Group control to Communications Zone on the 21 May 1945, the 631 Engineer Light Equipment Company was alerted and moved out on 2 June 1945, and the 207 Engineer Combat Battalion was also assigned to Communications Zone and moved out on the 22 June 1945. These changes left the Group with only the 164 and 1264 Engineer Combat Battalions of the original units, in addition to miscellaneous attached units.

On 15 June 1945, the Seventh Army assumed control of all units previously attached to the Ninth Army, and with the pre-arranged movement of British, Russian, French, and American troops into permanent areas, the Group and its attached units, on the 23 June 1945, moved to the vicinity of Göppingen, Germany.

The 1110 Engineer Combat Group continued to perform its primary mission of maintenance of roads and bridges, lumbering, and supervision of German industrial plants in its assigned area.

The above period also saw a change in Group Commanders. Colonel John T. O'Neill, who had done such a splendid job in commanding the Group during its most trying times, was transferred to Headquarters ETOUSA and thence to the States to join the Engineer Section, Headquarters, First Army. This transfer was effected on 1 June 1945. On this same date, Colonel Harry Meyer, formerly commander of the 1186 Engineer Combat Group, assumed command of the 1110th.

During this final phase of operations the Group units were as follows: 164 Engineer Combat Battalion, 297 Engineer Combat Battalion, 1264 Engineer Combat Battalion, 384 Engineer Battalion (Sep), and the 1019 Engineer Treadway Bridge Company. At the time of movement to the new area, the Group was attached to the VI Corps, but on the 20 July 1945, reverted to control of the XXI Corps.

Colonel Meyer's stay as Group Commander was destined to be brief, for on 8 July 1945, he was relieved of Command of the Group and ordered to report to Headquarters, XVI Corps to take the position of Corps Engineer. Colonel Meyer was doubly fortunate since at that time the Corps Headquarters was alerted for movement to the States.

On 11 July 1945, Major Adolph C Topinka, then executive officer of Group Headquarters, assumed command of the 1110th and remained as such until the final redeployment of high point officers and men was ordered by Army.

On 10 August 1945, per orders from Headquarters, Seventh Army, the 1110th Engineer Combat Group reverted to a non-operational status, and its attached units reverted to the control of the 1175 Engineer Combat Group.

Receipt of further orders from Headquarters, Seventh Army, started the wheels of redeployment rolling again. Approximately one third of the personnel of Group Headquarters and Headquarters Company (8 Officers and 16 Enlisted Men) are to be transferred to the 1144 Engineer Combat Group on the 26 August 1945, and will be further assigned to the 106th Infantry Division on the 29 August 1945, returning to the States sometime in September with that unit. The critical score for the officers being 85, and 75 points for the men. The few Group personnel remaining, having less than 60 points, will be transferred to the 1264 Engineer Combat Battalion, a Category I unit. At this stage of redeployment, Group Headquarters and Headquarters Company will be filled to T/O strength plus 2% with Engineer officers and men from Seventh Army units. The 1110th Engineer Combat Group, thus composed of enlisted men with 60-75 points and officers with 75-85 points, is then scheduled to leave the Army area on 16 September 1945, for return to the States and inactivation there, at the discretion of the War Department.

It is believed fitting to note here that the present Group Commander, Major Topinka, is one of the officers to be transferred to the 106th Division, and it is not known at this date who the new Group Commander will be.

Of necessity, the above resume of the activities of the 1110th Engineer Combat Group in the European Theater of Operations, must be brief and can only touch on a few of the many important tasks completed. However, every man was a vital cog in the organization and operations of the Group, which enjoyed an enviable reputation in the engineer operations of the U. S. Army in the European phase of World War II, and can feel proud of a job "well done".

It seems fitting that a word of tribute be written in memory of the men of this Group who made the supreme sacrifice. They have not died in vain. They will be remembered.