

HISTORY OF THE
337TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
For the months of
APRIL AND MAY 1945

The first days of April found the companies working at routine Engineer work such as patrolling and improving the 16 miles of roadway assigned to this organization. On 3 April, Route 6421 was completely oiled; the following day the shoulders of Route 1228 were oiled from L 572225 to L 599247.

Company C Blew 30 teller mines at L 614214 on 7 April. On this day the area for a Quartermaster dump at L 600151, which Company A had been leveling since 1 April, was completed and ready for use.

On 8 April, Company B blew 7 teller mines and 1 Topf mine at L 597219. The battalion moved its CP on 9 April from L 558118 to L 622203.

On 11 April, the battalion was relieved of the road assignments of Route 6421 from Morano to Carnevacci, Route 1228 from Carnevacci north to L 587246, and the Desmond Road from Le Vigne to Campidello.

On 12 April, a battalion forward CP was opened near Campidello at L 626230 and a battalion rear CP opened in Morano at L 630194.

On the morning of 14 April the battalion was out in strength, each company working to open a new road for tanks. A 1½ way road was made from L 637238 to L 635253 and a one-way road from L 635253 to L 638262. This road with its pull-outs and shoulders was swept and probed for mines. Schu mines, box mines, and Topf mines were blown or removed. Sergeant Arthur Smail, Company A, lost his left foot when he stepped on a Schu mine, and at the same time, Tec 5 Perry Taylor, also Company A, received facial wounds. Both men were hospitalized.

Battalion moved its rear CP to Riola at L 636236 on 15 April, and a new water point was opened at L 629232. The new road was improved, and from L 635253 to L 634264 Company A and Company B probed for mines and made the roadway wider. Fifty Italian Box mines, 50 Topf mines, and 50 Schu mines were estimated to be removed. Sergeant Chester Cripe, Company B, was killed when a Topf mine, which he had just pulled, exploded. The mine had a delay charge and as he examined it, having pulled it, the mine exploded. Pfc Leonard Becraft, Company B, was wounded from the same explosion. Company B had another man injured when Tec 5 Ross Ricks ran over a Topf mine with a bulldozer. He was thrown quite some distance from his D-7, breaking his left arm. The dozer had its left track blown completely off.

That night Company A's bivouac area was shelled with approximately 50 shells from German 170 mm guns. Two men were wounded as a result; Tec 5 Herman Kronbach was hit by a piece of shrapnel under his left eye, and Pfc Charles Strauss received a knee injury.

Company A moved its CP the following morning to L 632269. Company C filled two craters at L 637276 and L 634268, and swept the road from L 642281 to L 645285, blowing many anti-tank mines and Schu mines. Company B, 235th Engr C Bn, was attached to 337th Engr C Bn, as of 1800 hours, 16 April.

On 17 April, battalion moved its CP to L 640276. Company B moved to L 640275, Company C moved to L 645283, and Company B, 235th Engr C Bn moved to L 663279. Route 6423 was opened to two-way traffic from Bocca Rovari to Vergato, with the exception of 4 one-way bypasses. Company C swept the road from L 635250 to L 636263, from L 635263 to L 633265, and from L 645285 to L 656283. A total of 200 Schu mines, 140 Box mines, 65 Topf mines, and 15 "S" mines were removed. From the blow at L 656283, 750 pounds of German explosives were removed. Tec 4 Arthur Reinders, Company C, was injured at L 654285 when the bulldozer he was operating struck a teller mine which was buried in the side of a bank. This D-7 also had one of its tracks blown off.

Company B, 235th Engr C Bn repaired a 500 foot crater at L 674283 on 18 April. On 19 April, the battalion was relieved of all roads above the 28 Northing except the road from Castel D'Aiano through Campidello and S. Cristoforo to Vergato. This road was for patrol only.

On 20 April, B Company, 235th Engr C Bn was detached as of 0700 hours.

On 21 April, the battalion was on the move again, this time to the vicinity of Croce del Padrole at L 684337. Company B, however, went forward to L 739443. On this day responsibility was assumed for the highway from Croce del Padrole, Mertano, to the Samaggia Valley road at L 671384. In support of the 1st Armored Division, the battalion also assumed responsibility for the Samoggia Valley road.

22 April found the battalion moving to the vicinity of Bomporto at L 670739, after being relieved of all road assignments, to follow up the 126th Mountain Engr Bn. Upon arrival at Bomporto, Lt. Col. Rufus Wesson, Commander of the battalion, and Capt. Wray, went on reconnaissance to view a possible Bailey bridge site. Turning left off Highway 12 at L 665857 and riding a short distance, they recieved small arms and machine gun fire from a group of houses and from the fields on both sides of the road. The three occupants of the vehicle, which included Tec 5 Misewicz, the driver, jumped into a ditch. Lt. Col. Wesson was shot in the mouth, his right arm, and his chest. Tec 5 Misewicz was wounded in his right leg, and Capt Wray escaped safely. Tec 5 Misewicz crawled along the ditch to safety and was then hospitalized. Lt. Col. Wesson remained captive until the following day when he was set free and also hospitalized by the Infantry.

Master Sergeant Lewis F. Farrell and Technical Sergeant Howard B. Moyer were appointed Warrant Officers (JG) on this day and remained with the battalion as Assistant battalion MTO and Military Personnel Officer respectively.

Major Ernest L. Rowell, Jr, Executive Officer of the 185th Engr C Bn was attached to the battalion on 23 April to assume command.

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On 24 April, the battalion moved to the vicinity of S. Benedette Po. Work was begun on the approaches to the Po River, while Company B operated assault boats so that the Infantry could cross the river. Two platoons from Company C were led across the river by Major Rowell with enough equipment to repair a bridge further north which was across the Mincio River at F 605153.

Company A, on 25 April, prepared and installed fifty (50) 12 ton rubber floats which were used to reinforce a heavy ponton bridge across the Po at F 586138. They assisted in the construction of the ponton sections and placed surface tread on the entire bridge. At the same time work was still in progress on the other bridge which was across the Mincio. The trestle bend on this bridge was damaged by explosives and was repaired. Surface trend was also included in its repair and a sturdy guard rail was constructed.

Verona area was the battalion's next stop. On 27 April, the Po was left behind and CP's were set up south of the city at F 557482.

On 28 April, the responsibility of the MSR was assumed from Villafranca north to road junction at Route 11 at F 540556, and on Route 11 east to F 425555. Company A took over the duties of operating an aerial beacon on the airfield south of Verona at F 555466.

On 29 April, the battalion was ordered to assume an Infantry role and to guard the MSR from Ghedi to Montechiari to Bagnolo. Many Germans who had been cut off from their units, were infiltrating north in search of their units. In doing so, the MSR was harassed in many instances. A battalion CP was established in Peschiera di Garda, and H & S company guarded the heavy engineer equipment which the companies would not use. Company A moved to Ghedi, Company B to Montechiari, and Company C to Bagnolo. A battalion forward CP was opened at Montechiari.

The Infantry work was continued on the last day of the month. Company C turned over a complete German hospital to the 15th Field Hospital. In the captured hospital were 82 wounded, 17 ward boys, 9 nurses, and 5 doctors. Prisoners numbering 1,113 were transported to the PW Stockade in Montechiari.

Killed or wounded in action.

Sgt Arthur R. Smail, 33114663, Company A, wounded in action on April 14 at Specchia, Italy.

Tec 5 Perry A. Taylor, 34289576, Company A, wounded in action on 14 April at Spicchia, Italy.

Sgt. Chester M. Gripe, 6658384, Company B, killed in action on 15 April near Rocco di Roffeno, Italy.

Tec 5 Ross J. Ricks, 37453394, Company B, wounded in action on 15 April near Spicchia, Italy.

Pfc Leonard A. Becraft, 13105702, Company B, wounded in action on 15 April near Rocco di Roffeno, Italy.

Tec 5 Herman J. Kronbach, 37288389, Company A wounded in action on 16 April near Morano, Italy.

Pfc Charles S. Strauss, 32433063, Company A, wounded in action on 16 April near Morano, Italy.

Tec 4 Arthur H. Reinders, 12095280, Company C, wounded in action on 17 April near Ceriglio, Italy.

Lt Col. Rufus Wasson, O-341835, Hq, wounded in action on 22 April near Lamotta, Italy.

Tec 5 Edward E. Misewicz, 33180733, H & S Company, wounded in action on 22 April near Lamotta, Italy.

Awards and Decorations.

Purple Heart:

Sgt Arthur R. Small

Tec 4 Arthur H. Reinders

Tec 5 Ross J. Ricks

Tec 5 Perry A. Taylor

Pfc Leonard A. Beeraft

On 1 May, the battalion moved its CP to the vicinity of Brescia; Company A moved just north of Mantova to F 111597; and Company C moved southwest of Brescia. Company B carried on its infantry role at Montichiari. The companies were so placed that they might guard all the main supply routes, patrol, and maintain all roads in their respective areas. Germans had been by-passed by the fast-moving infantry and were trapped; they were now attempting to rejoin their organizations to the north and causing many firefights in doing so. A 24 hour armed defensive road patrol was established from the Po River north of S. Benedetto Po to Brescia for the purpose of guarding this route. Company B, on this day, transported 102 prisoners of war from Partisan control in Peschiera to the Prisoner of War cage in Montichiari. German convoys were travelling unguarded and of their own accord to Brescia to Surrender and Company C was the only company available to guard them. The situation became extremely dangerous with more and more Germans surrendering and Partisans turning in large numbers of them but with the aid of trucks from H & S Company and Company B, plus the German vehicles, the officers and men from Company C managed to convoy all prisoners from Brescia to Montichiari. The next morning, 2 May, a battalion of infantry from the 338th Infantry arrived to relieve the situation, but by this time all was under control.

On 2 May the same armed 40 mile road patrol was continued and Company A still operated the aerial beacon at Villa Franca which had been in operation since 28 April. About 1830 hours Tec 5 George Vuick, Company B shot and killed a German General, later identified as Brigadier General Strahammer, Commanding General of the 114th Jaeger Division. Resume of which follows was written by Captain Dennis A. Ayres, Commanding Company B: "On the afternoon of 2 May 1945, 1st Lt. Ernest D. Rhodes, 2nd Lt. Carl M. Layman, Jr., Tec 5 Vuick and Tec 5 Corso accompanied a group of Partisans into the fields Southwest of Montichiari to aid them in capturing six armed Germans who had been reported as coming through the fields. When the enemy was first seen all six were together running through the fields. A Partisan called to them to surrender and after much persuasion, during which a few rounds were fired into the air, three of the enemy surrendered but the other three ran away and took cover in some bushes near a house. One of the captured Germans was a Lieutenant, so he was taken over in the hope that he would order or persuade the remainder to surrender. When they arrived near the three still at large the Lieutenant refused to offer any help, but after still more

persuasion, plus a few shots fired into the air, two Germans laid down their arms and came forward, saying that there were no more enemy. The one still at large could not be seen but his exact whereabouts were known. He was asked several times to surrender, a few shots were fired into the air, and Tec 5 Vuick threw a hand grenade a safe distance away from the German, attempting to show him that he must surrender or be killed. Tec 5 Vuick then moved around to the left and saw the German who was leveling a pistol to shoot. Tec 5 Vuick fired first, a burst from a Tommy-gun which killed the enemy immediately. Lt. Layman removed a cocked and loaded caliber 9 Baretta from the dead officer's hand and learned for the first time his high rank. Lt. Layman searched the body and removed a personal diary which was sent immediately to Corp G-2, and the officer's insignia which he brought to this headquarters in order to ascertain the dead officer's rank. The body was then recovered along with a picture which had been overlooked in the first search. He was killed at F-135494 and his body taken on 4 May 1945 to the 87th Mountain Infantry Graves Registration Service. Supporting witnesses are 1st Lt. Ernest D. Rhodes, 2d Lt. Carl M. Layman Jr, Tec 5 John Corso and Tec 5 George M. Vuick."

The battalion moved its CP from Brescia to Milano on 3 May. Company C also moved to Milano area and Company A moved near to Bergamo at K-630855. Company B remained once again in Montichiari continuing in its infantry role. The armed road patrol from the Po through Mantova, Goito, Montichiari to Brescia was continued in addition to a forty-five mile defensive patrol of the Auto-strada from Brescia to Milano. Company A was ordered to move the beacon from Villafranca to another location which was west of Milano.

On 4 May the beacon was installed and in operation. The armed road patrol was continued as in previous days and in addition forty route #9 signs and twenty route #35 signs were posted on respective routes. A work order was received to build a 170 foot D/T Bailey bridge across the Ticino River at Pavia, and a reconnaissance was made that afternoon. A German bridge had been built across a bombed-out section of the old Italian bridge but it was not strong enough to take heavy traffic. The reason for this was that the Germans had build a pier in the middle of the bridge which made the bridge safe up to classification 9. When the piles were driven they were placed on them to act as a platform. The pier was then built on this platform but the bending movement was too much to support any heavy load. After reconnoitering the bridge site it was decided that 180 foot D/T would be better to allow more of the bridge to rest on more secure abutment.

On 5 May work was begun on the 180' D/T Bailey bridge and by nightfall it was 50 percent complete. The men worked steadily and did not have to fear enemy shelling or other enemy activity. No troubles were encountered and no work was done during darkness. The road patrols were continued and route signs were posted on routes 36, 35, 33, 11 and 9.

Work continued on the Bailey bridge on 6 May, and by darkness the bridge was opened to traffic and 95 percent complete. It was decided that the name of the bridge would be the "Ernie Pyle Bridge," in memory of the famed news correspondent. The ramps at each end of the bridge were 30 feet to allow for the distance that the Bailey bridge had been jacked up to clear the German construction. Company B moved to Milano on this day and the usual road patrol continued. Route signs were posted along routes 36, 11, 33, and 35.

The "Ernie Pyle Bridge" was completed on 7 May. Company C began work on the approaches to the heavy ponton bridge across the Po river just south of Pavia at K-148243. The original road was a German one-way military road, and a two-way Class 40, all-weather road was required. Company C also received 149 German POW's from the Partisans at San Giuliano on Route #9 and transported them to the POW stockade at Piacenza. The Partisans came to the CP of Company C requesting food for the Germans who were being held prisoner in a nearby castle. Since no rations were available, the Germans were loaded onto trucks and taken to the proper authorities. The same road patrol was continued and route signs were posted on routes 3546, 3545, 3547, and 35.

On 8 May work was continued on the approaches to the Ponton bridge, and route signs were posted on routes 992, 993, 36 and the autostrada. Company A moved its CP from Bergamo to Milano in the same area as Company B. This move took place on 9 May. A foot walk was constructed on the Ernie Pyle bridge on 9 May by Company C, and route signs were posted on routes 9, 35, and 42. On 10 May, 134 loads of rock were spread on the approach road to the ponton bridge. In Milano, Company A started work at leveling a parking lot for AMG. With the aid of an R-4 the area was cleared of rubble from bombed-out buildings. Company A was also busy in checking the arena area in Milano for mines. No mines were discovered.

Company C moved from the school building in which it was living, to a small lake east of Milano on 11 May. The parking lot was successfully completed and an excavation for a gas tank was started in the same area.

From 12 May through 16 May routine engineer work was accomplished. Road patrol was carried on by all companies, road blocks were removed, some of which took two days, the aerial beacon was in operation and water-points were kept in operation in Milano, Genoa, and Piacenza.

On 17 May the battalion was relieved of operating the aerial beacon. On 19 May the battalion closed its CP in Milano and moved to the same lake as Company C. The purpose behind this move was to train each company in floating Bailey bridging. The necessary equipment was ordered and the battalion was standing by until 1 June when the training would start.

On 23 May the battalion was alerted for direct redeployment during June as Category II and to move to Montecatini Redeployment Area before 1 June. During that day and the next all companies worked, preparing for the move. On 24 May Company C installed a diving board at a large outdoor, "Keystone" swimming pool in Milano.

260 men from this battalion were transferred to the 255th Engineer C battalion on 25 May. All of these men had 85 points or more and were transferred to be redeployed to the United States. In return the 255th Engineer C Battalion transferred 129 men to this organization with less than 85 points. This left the battalion with an assigned strength of 391 men on 26 May against an authorized strength of 605 enlisted men. On 26 May five officers were transferred from the 255th Engineer C battalion to this organization to replace existing vacancies.

Four officers and eight enlisted men started for Montecatini on 28 May to act as the advance detail and report to the Redeployment Headquarters for information concerning the move.

On 29 May Major Pickett, CE, was assigned and joined and became the battalion's new executive officer. On the same day ten enlisted men from the 235th Engineer C Battalion were assigned to this battalion to accept responsible assignments within the organization.

On 30 May all CP's were closed in Milano and the battalion moved by truck convoy to spend the night in bivouac near Bologna. All companies cleared Milano at half hour intervals, Headquarters starting at 1000 hours in accordance with movement control orders. On 31 May the overnight bivouac area was cleared at 1100 hours and convoy again moved by orders of traffic control. At approximately 1600 hours all companies had reported to Montecatini and work on overseas movement was begun immediately. Ten enlisted men were assigned to the battalion from 175th Engineer Regiment on this day and joined the organization the day following.

During the month there were no casualties, and no awards were made.