

344th Engineer Regiment (GS)

during the Italian Campaign

Prior History

The 344th Engineer Regiment (GS) was constituted within the IV Corps Area in 1921 as an Organized Reserve Unit. It was activated into Federal Service at CAMP CLAIBORNE, Louisiana 29 April 1942 being organized, in general, with officers from civil life, cadremen from the 113th Engineer Combat Battalion and selectees direct from Reception Centers in the I, II, VI and IX Corps Areas. Its initial training in the United States was basic and very limited.

The regiment moved overseas 1 July 1942, arriving at GOUROCH, Scotland 12 July 1942. It was immediately assigned to Southern Base Section ETOUSA and undertook construction projects in Southern England between 18 July 1942 and 18 September 1942 and again between 18 December 1942 and 18 January 1943. During the interim, it was trained at Wiltshire Barracks, DEVIZES, England as an Engineer Combat Regiment.

The regiment again moved overseas 24 January 1943, arriving at ORAN, Algeria 1 February 1943. It was assigned to Mediterranean Base Section, NATOUSA and undertook general construction projects in NORTH AFRICA between 2 February 1943 and 18 July 1943 and again between 1 September 1943 and 12 November 1943.

During the interim, the regiment was assigned to Fifth Army and attached to Fifth Army Invasion Training Center at PORT AUX POULES, Algeria under which it trained as an Engineer Shore Regiment and then trained the 36th Infantry Division and one combat team of the 34th Infantry Division in

amphibious operations, including the clearing of beach and underwater obstacles, preparatory to the invasion of ITALY. During the latter period of this attachment, it became apparent that the Engineer Shore Regiment which was originally selected for the invasion would not be available, in consequence of which, the regiment completely equipped itself as an Engineer Shore Regiment, loaded its equipment aboard ships and then undertook the invasion rehearsal, only to have the 531st Engineer Shore Regiment arrive for the invasion about a week before D-day. Its failure to participate in the invasion of ITALY was a severe blow to the morale of the regiment, despite the fact it was not originally assigned any mission but training.

With Fifth Army

VOLTURNO - GARIGLIANO Phase: The regiment was again assigned to Fifth Army 12 November 1943, moved from ARCOLE, Algeria to ORAN, Algeria 13 November 1943, embarked on the S S DICKMAN 14 November 1943, and departed overseas the same day to join the Fifth Army in ITALY. It arrived at NAPLES, Italy 17 November 1943, disembarked the same day and moved to BAGNOLI Staging Area where it awaited the arrival of its equipment.

On 29 November 1943, Company C moved to the vicinity of TRIFLISCO on special duty where it assisted in the operation of an Army Bridge Dump, moving 18 December 1943 to the vicinity of VAIRANO on the same mission and did not return to the regiment until 7 January 1944.

On 1, 2 and 3 December 1943, the regiment (less Company C) initially moved to the rear of the line CANCELLO - CAPUA - CASERTA as army engineer troops and undertook the maintenance of the army roads south of the line and of the CANCELLO, CAPUA and TRIFLISCO bridges across the VOLTURNO River.

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The operations of the regiment moved forward as the situation warranted until 24 December 1943 when elements were moved along and to the east of Highway 6, Companies A, B and D, assisted by some 500 civilian laborers, undertook the maintenance of the route - RJ Highways 6 and 7 - VAIRANO - RAVISCANINA - PRATELLO and the construction of Hospital entrances, roads and hard standings for gasoline dumps, the operation of numerous quarries, the clearance of mines and marking of minefields, and the removal and/or replacement of Bailey bridges while Companies E and F undertook the construction of a 530' Bailey bridge over the VOLTURNO River near RAVISCANINA which became the longest Bailey bridge erected by American troops. It consisted of 2 - 135' spans, 3 - 70' spans and two approach spans, was supported on bailey panel bents, and was decked with 330' of double double bailey bridging and 200' of double single bailey bridging. This bridge was labelled the "MUNDORFF" Bridge in memory of Corporal Russell B. Mundorff of Company F who was killed during the construction.

This period of the regiment's activities with Fifth Army was perhaps the most disheartening of its entire service. The season was rainy, the weather was cold and the roads, in most instances, were single lane macadam roads that had been nearly destroyed by heavy traffic. In many instances, the roadside ditches, not running with water, were filled to road level with soft oozy mud. Men had to work long hours standing knee deep in water and mud without boots or satisfactory raincoats to open drainage ditches or scoop out the mud in order that the roads could be repaired. The road surface had to be replaced and reshaped and in many cases where the road base had failed many yards of base rock had to be quarried, hauled and placed to make the roads usable. In such place over 300' in length, rock to the depth of seven feet had to be placed before the road could be stabilized for traffic.

The RAVISCANINA bridging operation was no small matter for it was not the normal tactical bridge but was required to be built as a semi-permanent bridge. Too, the bad weather effected it. While the concrete caps were being placed on the 6 usable stone piers out of an original 8, a high flood came down the river washing out a great part of the concrete and much of the equipment. A day later, on 31 December, high winds and sub-freezing temperatures stopped all operations for several days. The winds blew down all tents of the constructing companies and personal equipment that was not blown or washed away was burned or damaged beyond reuse.

On 15 January 1944, the 1st Battalion was assigned the mission of engineer combat troops in direct support of the 2nd DIM (French Expeditionary Corps) in the COLLI - CARDITO area, moving Companies A and C thereto on 15 January and Company B on 26 January and remained on such duty until 17 March 1944. At about the same time, the 2nd Battalion advanced to undertake the maintenance of roads and installations and the replacement of Bailey bridges across the route RAVISCANINA - PRATELLO - CAPRIATI - VENAFRO - COLLI and later to ISERNIA. This period of the regiment's activities was more interesting than the last for at one time or another the entire regiment came under hostile fire and began to take its losses. The 1st Battalion found, that while it was in support of a French Infantry Division and in that capacity was required to act as corps engineer troops, its role was even more important for the divisional engineer troops were North African natives and not being well qualified in field engineering often had to be supported at the front. The area was very mountainous and precipitous and offered many opportunities for hostile defense which was made good use of. The roads were all macadam, narrow and winding, with little opportunity for bypassing the many demolished structures or

cornish roads. The weather was uniformly bad, for it was icy cold and rained or snowed nearly every day. But the Battalion took all this in its stride; it bulldozed bypasses for the movement of the infantry and its supplies; it cleared out and rebuilt demolished cornish roads; it widened the narrow roads into two lane roads by revetting and filling; it hauled thousands of loads of gravel for rebuilding of roads or creating roads along streams and trails for movement of artillery; and it removed mines from numerous minefields and barriers and marked and fenced off some fourteen other minefields aggregating an estimated 200,000 mines. In this connection, it is interesting to note that perhaps every type of mine available to the enemy were located in these minefields including Tellermine Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, 5 mines, 3 varieties of the Italian 'Schu' mine, concrete picket mines, small and large spherical mines, improvised No. 10 tin can mines and improvised wood box anti-tank mines. All this it did under more or less constant hostile fire, mostly artillery but often small arms and mortar fire. Its losses were nominal. It suffered 11 casualties, two dead and nine wounded, one an officer. Its record was outstanding. The work of the 2nd Battalion to which were attached at various times, the 1st Engineer Company (Italian), the 23rd Engineer Battalion (Italian), the II Section Gruppo Artiglieria (Italian), while less heroic was also outstanding. The roads were very much like those to the rear, narrow macadam roads with ditches filled with water or mud. All required revetting and filling to make wide enough for two lane traffic or for the movement of tanks. Some new roads had to be built to support the French Expeditionary Corps as a whole which with the other roads that needed repairing required the operation of numerous quarries and all the trucks that could be obtained. One of the new roads was a concealed road which ran down a stream bed for some four miles for which more than 2000 pounds of

explosives had to be used to open up the massive stone gorges. It had in all some eleven Bailey bridges to maintain, one of which was replaced when destroyed by artillery and two were replaced with semi-permanent wooden structures. It also widened the narrow bridges to two lane traffic, installed 5 culverts and fill around bad crossings to take care of traffic, and it removed mines and marked and fenced off minefields, and provided entrance roads for hospitals (both American and French), for ammunition supply points and ordnance maintenance units besides operating numerous quarries. The regiment (less the 1st Battalion) had its losses also for three enlisted men and one Italian soldier were killed and five enlisted men were wounded including two men killed at Regimental Headquarters when it came under heavy artillery fire for two days.

On 12 March 1944, Company E moved from CAPRIATI to ROCCAMONFINA and took over from British Eighth Army troops the maintenance of the SKIPTON and PATELY floating bridges across the GARIGLIANO River and of the roads in the vicinity thereof. These bridges, usually smoke covered, were under enemy observation the entire period and often under fire. On 17 and 19 March 1944, the remainder of the regiment moved to the general vicinity of SESSA as Army Engineer Troops in direct support of the French Expeditionary Corps and undertook the maintenance of the roads and the replacement of essential Bailey bridges along the routes SESSA - MIGNANO (including fire swept trails and roads leading to the GARIGLIANO River), PONTE - CARLO - S. CLEMENTE and ROCCAMONFINA - TEANO during which time three large bridges were constructed at SESSA, above PONTE and near ROCCAMONFINA, seven culverts and fills installed and two bridges strengthened. On 24 March 1944, Company B relieved Company E of maintenance of the SKIPTON Bridge and on 13 April 1944 the maintenance of both the SKIPTON and PATELY bridges was assumed by the French after their personnel had been trained

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by the companies. The maintenance of roads during this period was more simple than the previous due to better weather conditions but much work was done by the regiment and some 300 civilian laborers in their repair and widening and the improvement of stream crossings. Nearly all roads leading to the GARIGLIANO River were resurfaced or rebuilt, much of the materials having to be delivered during the hours of darkness due to enemy observation. Numerous quarries were operated during this period to meet the additional requirements and the 427th Engineer Dump Truck Company was attached to meet the additional transportation requirements. Also, during this period the Regiment assembled materials for and prefabricated them for the construction of a 270' semi-permanent bridge across the GARIGLIANO River near SAN AMBROGIO which it was to build immediately following the river crossing. Due to a change in the tactical plan, the construction of the bridge was abandoned. The problems during this period of activity were not numerous and were met without difficulty. The clearing of mines and marking and fencing of numerous minefields particularly along the GARIGLIANO River was accomplished without incident and the malaria control program in which all streams were opened and wells and swamps taken care of, was participated in by all companies. The losses were lighter, one enlisted man being killed while on duty at the SKIPTON Bridge while one officer and one enlisted man were so badly injured during the construction of the SESSA Bridge that they were evacuated to the United States.

On 27 April 1944, the 1st Battalion assumed the work responsibilities of the 2nd Battalion which moved to the vicinity of FRANCOLISE for a one week refresher course in basic and technical training and on 5 May 1944 the Battalions reversed the procedure and the 1st Battalion commenced its training.

Upon completion of the respective battalion training periods, each returned to its bivouac and reassumed its original work assignment.

The regiment arrived in Italy with a full compliment of officers, warrant officers and men and its complete T/O and E equipment. It was soon found, after operations were commenced, that this equipment was not sufficient to meet campaign needs and there were provided six D-7 bulldozers from Army Engineer Depot stock and one platoon of an Engineer Dump Truck Company. Still later, about 1 February 1944, ten 1½ ton weapons carriers were provided and an entire Engineer Dump Truck Company was attached. The greatest need, that of light transportation, was not met until during the next phase.

There follows in tabular form information on the following subjects:

- A. Timber Bridges and Culverts.
- B. Bailey Bridges.
- C. Mine Removal.
- D. Road Maintenance.
- E. Miscellaneous Work.

The morning of 11 May 1944 found the regiment poised for its support of the French Expeditionary Corps attack across the Garigliano River and the mountainous country beyond. Roads had been prepared for hospitals, ammunition dumps and ordnance maintenance units within the regimental section and roads and bridges, including a number of new roads and trails to the Garigliano had been completed. On 15 May 1944, following the opening of the offensive campaign that lead to the capture of ROME, the regiment took over the maintenance of the Lion (Skipton), Jaguar, Leopard and Tiger (Pately) military bridges over the Garigliano River, of the Lynx floating bridge near AMBROCIO which it had constructed during the night of 16 May 1944 and of the roads leading to the several crossings. Then followed in rapid succession as the campaign advanced, the repair and maintenance of roads and stream crossings behind the advance of the French Expeditionary Corps including in general the road net: CASTELFORTE - AUSONIA - S.GIORGIO - S.AMBROCIO; AUSONIA - S.OLIVA - PONTECORVO - PICO - VALLE CORSA - CASTRO DEI VOLSCI; CASTRO DEI VOLSCI - ANASENA - PRIVERNO - GAVIGNANO - CECCANO; GAVIGNANO - CISTERNA - VELLETRI - MARINO - ROME - FRASCATI - ROCCA PRIORA - ARTENA; ROME - MONTEROSI - VETRALLA - VITERBO; VITERBO, TUSCANI, VALANTANO - S. LORENZO - MONTEFIASCONE; S. LORENZO - PITIGLIANO - MANCIANO - ARCIDORSO - PAGANICO - RADICOFANI - AQUAPENDTE; and the roads extending from RADICOFANI and PAGANICO towards SIENNA. The work before ROME was, in general, along partially improved mountain roads and included preparation of bypasses, removal of mine fields and restoration of mine cratered roads, while the work beyond ROME,

usually on better roads, included, in addition, the installation as well as removal of bailey bridges and the construction of heavy culvert fills and semi-permanent bridges, some 15 in number. On 30 June 1944, the regiment was withdrawn from its operations and moved to CIVITAVECCHIA where it embarked and moved by sea 1 July 1944 to POZZUOLI, arriving 2 July 1944 where it was relieved of assignment to Fifth Army and was assigned to Seventh Army for participation in the invasion of Southern France.

The regiment in its attempt to speed up the bridging of semi permanent stream crossings developed a new technique in such work that is applicable to crossings during dry weather. In the vicinity of AQUAPEDENTE were four blown crossings, one gap spanned by a Bailey bridge and the others, all masonry arch structures of 5 to 8 arches were bypassed. The Bailey bridge was dispensed with by providing a culvert and fill in 5 hours. One of the longer masonry bridges, some twenty feet ^{high} and with three blown arches was converted to two lane traffic use in 14 hours by filling the blown arch spans with river gravel for which 4-D7s, 2-D8s, and 3-2½ ton dump trucks were used. The same scheme was proposed for the remaining three masonry bridges but the regiment was withdrawn before the work could be accomplished.

During the "Attack on Rome" phase the regiment had only 3 casualties, 2 killed and 1 wounded in action. No citations or decorations were awarded any personnel of the regiment during its service with Fifth Army except for a Soldier's Medal given Corporal Charles Johnson, Co E, for his exploit in saving a French Moroccan soldier from drowning in the Carigliano River on 8 August 1944 and 3 Purple

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subjects:

OAF/jmt
25 February 1945

A. Timber Bridges and Culverts
Subject: Engineer History.
B. Bailey Bridges
To: C. Mine Removal Officer, 34th Engineer General Service Regiment,
A.P.O. #758, U. S. Army.
D. Road Maintenance
1. A history of the engineer work done during the Italian campaign is being
E. Miscellaneous Work. A letter from the Fifth Army Engineer, dated 15 November, 1944, was sent to your unit, requesting as complete an account as possible of your activities while with the Fifth Army in Italy. To this letter no reply has been received as yet.

2. It is again requested that you send that information to this headquarters. The pertinent portion of the 15 November 1944 letter is reproduced below, in case you do not have the original:

a. The report is to contain as much data as possible pertaining to the following outline:

1. Very brief history of the organization before joining the Fifth Army. Starting date and place of activation, date of overseas movement, length and location of overseas service, and date of assignment to this headquarters.

2. Information about your unit's activities from the time of landing in Italy until capture and the Volturno was reached, including the date and place of capture and the date of arrival on the Volturno, and on the activities of the Volturno. The scope and facilities available during the period from 15 July to 15 August, and the location of these facilities. Information is desired on the following subjects:

(a) Mine removal

(b) Bridge work

(c) Mine fields cleared or laid (estimated no. of mines)

(d) Mine cleared

(e) Structures and levees worked on

(f) Miscellaneous

3. The period from the attack on the Volturno to the Garigliano River in May 1945, including the winter troubles and mine and

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