

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 36TH ENGINEER COMBAT REGIMENT WWII

The 36th Engineer Regiment was organized at Plattsburg Barracks in 1941. It was originally planned to be a part of the Engineer Amphibian Command centered on Fort Edwards Mass. However the US Navy got a little petulant and insisted that they should be in charge of assault landings on foreign shores and they won out. However the Seahorse representing their origin stuck and was soon determined to be very appropriate.

Actually just the 1st and 3rd Battalions were at Plattsburg and the 2nd was already in England and after the Navy won the right to control the landings they spent some time teaching sailors how to run landing boats. The Regiment went to Fort Bragg for manoeuvres and in October 1942 was assigned the mission of landing with the 3rd Infantry Division. The landing was not actually in Casablanca but Port Lyauty nearby. Aside from a few skirmishes with the French all went very easily. Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion had sailed from England and landed in Algiers with an English task force and it too went smoothly.

General Patton had taken control of the forces in Africa and there was little left to do as the Germans pulled back to Sicily. The 36th spent most of the time training, training, training. There were Assault Bridging Schools, Mine and Demolition Schools, and most of the Junior Officers, including me went to British Commando School. We were training for the landing in Sicily again with the 3rd Infantry Division and it was a very big landing with the British on the right supposedly having the job of getting to Messina while Patton's 5th Army was supposed to be on a flank guard to the left. Patton fooled them and raced to Messina before the Brits got there but it was a terrific fight in which we shared very little because shortly after the landing the 36th Engrs were ordered back to Tunis to train for another landing.

The landing in Salerno was almost a disaster. We landed with the 36th Infantry Division, their first combat and they did not do very well. We landed as an Infantry Regiment and went immediately into the front lines on the Sele River. We were fighting the Hermann Goering Panzer Division and they were tough. Our H Company was detached to fight with the Rangers at a smaller landing north of the regular beachhead to cut the road from Rome and they later received the Presidential Unit Citation for this scrap. The Regiment, meanwhile knocked off a couple of German tanks and they had one battalion cut off for a day but fought off the Germans and in about two weeks the Germans retreated and we headed north.

We worked hard as Combat Engineers through mountain passes and over swollen rivers. When we reached Naples the 3rd Battalion was assigned to clear the mines from the port

and in one day we lost 16 men killed in a giant explosion. We continued north for some weeks and then the 6th Corps was called back to train for the Anzio landing. The landing was to be made by the British 1st Infantry Division and the American 3rd Infantry Division and we were attached to them again. The Rangers again asked for H Company to land with them in the main port while the 3rd Div landed South of Anzio and the Brits landed north. The landing was a pushover but in two days the Germans hammered us badly and we went to the front line attached to the British 1st Division as an Infantry Regiment. We were relieved after a week or so for just a couple of days and then we went back up to the front on the same line of the Moletta River but this time we were attached to the British 56th Div which had just landed. We stayed for 45 days in a row without relief taking all kinds of attacks and shelling and lost quite a few people.

When we were relieved by a Scottish Regiment we went back to the shell battered town to get some clean clothes and replacements for our losses. In ten days we went back to the front, this time to the Mussolini Canal to relieve the First Special Service Force and we fought on that line for about a month when the time came to attack out of the beachhead. I was wounded on the next to last day of the beachhead and went to the Hospital in Naples for several months. Right after the breakout the Regiment was attached to the 36th Infantry Division for the assault on Velletri. All military records tell you that the assault was made by the 36th Div but it was not except technically because we were attached to them. Their Infantry Regiments by passed the city

When I got out of the hospital I joined the Regiment in Pozzuoli where they were training for a landing in Southern France and I had only a week to meet all my new men and wonder where all the old ones were.

We landed with the 3rd Infantry Div at Cap Cavalaire on a relatively easy operation and soon headed north where our next combat was in the France Comte where the Germans decided to hold the line. We fought through all the small towns you never heard about, Rambervillers, Baccarat, Luneville and the going got tougher all the time. AS it got colder the Germans got tougher as we neared their homeland. I was wounded again trying to get a bridge in at Mertzwiller and thought I would have a nice rest in the hospital when the Germans counter attacked. All ambulatory patients were sent immediately back to the front line and for weeks we fought in the snow and ice and it was quite a miserable winter. When the bridge at Remagen was captured and Patton got another bridge over the Rhine it was effectively all over. I didn't fire another shot and we were busy waving surrendering Germans to the rear. The war was soon over. WE had lost heavily but the 36th Engineers were as good a regiment anyone could hope for. We received 10 campaign stars and 5 combat landing arrowheads. When the war was over I got to be company commander,

John T. Fallon, Capt. USA Ret. of the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment, wrote and mailed this "brief history" for me in June of 2004.