

CHUBBUCK

INTERVIEW WITH COLONEL GARDES & LT. COLONEL CHUBBUCK

4 NOV 1950 AT COLONEL GARDES' QUARTERS IN ARLINGTON --

USING MAPS AND PERSONAL NOTES

Col. Gardes: It had gone into the lines of B Company from the 2nd Battalion so that when the 2nd Battalion was given the mission of blocking the road into the Beach-head from ^{Pt. Anilla} ~~Aldevia~~ they were told to hold the high ground to the east of the Calore River. To help them out I attached A Company of the 1st Battalion to them. They organized the ground that day and held the position astride the road coming into the beach-head from ^{Pt. Anilla} Aldevia as I recollect for a matter of three days during which as I recollect they had considerable combat activity there and withstood severe tank attack. It was over on their left flank that the German drove down to the burnt bridge which was the closest run that they came to a break through into the beach-head area. I think it was about D plus 3 that the end run was made by the Rangers up to beaches at Maori and A Company was pulled out as a . D . beach party to go in with that landing and after D landing and setting up of the beaches A Company went in with

the Rangers and served with them both as Engineers and infantry during the several weeks they were fighting in that area

Col. Shotwell: Which company did you say went in with the Rangers?

Col. Gardes: ^H A Company Capt. ^{Gillespie} Gieskie there was also a company from the 540th went in up there and that operated the beaches, you see A Company assisted in unloading the assault as soon as they unloaded and started the beaches went in and operated as combat Engineers and I think were committed as infantry very soon after the landing. That left only C Company with Regiment Headquarters and C Company was working continuously laying mine fields cutting wire out in front of the areas at night, in other words organizing the ground in front of the defense bastion at night and just being used for 101 miscellaneous jobs like that during the beach-head phase before we went back to Engineering. After the break out from Salerno or at the time of the break out as we were breaking out the Regiment reverted to its duties as combat Engineers and we served with the VI Corps from then on till after Anzio. Most of our

Most of our operations were in support of the 3rd Division although we also supported the 34th Division for period at a time. The operations after the break out from Salerno were up through the mountains through Locerno.

Col. Shotwell: On the Burma trail, as you call it, up through the mountains north of Salerno I think that is the place where Colonel Thomas mentioned about getting a bunch of mules, donkeys or mules, to make transportation over the trails or was that at Anzio

Col. Chubbuck: It was in Italy - The 3rd Division

Col. Gardes: The 3rd Division used them quite a bit -- that was North of Salerno I think that was about ^{Venafro} ~~Sacatro~~.

Col. Chubbuck: That was around the ^{Volturano} Volturano I believe that was where they first started to use donkeys

Col. Shotwell: We'll talk about them later.

Col. Gardes: We moved through the mountains north of Salerno along Route 88 to ^FAboli. That route between Salerno and Avellino was extremely difficult in that the Germans not only blew the bridges but in places blew the road off the side of the mountains that coupled with the fact that we had no Engineer supplies other than what we had with us plus

what we could improvise led to many difficult situations which were further complicated as the rains started and as we were in the mountains it was seldom that you could get your transportation off the road, when you got it off the road you had difficulty getting it on again, after we reached Avellino the operations continued north to Benevento and we also performed Engineer work on the secondary road which went across the mountains to connect with the main running road between Benevento and Maddaloni as you can see this is just a trail which winds back & forth and the road doubles back on itself which interfered with our using prime movers with trailers over the road as the curves were too sharp for the turning angle of your trailers.

About October we were placed in support of the 34th Division in addition to performing Engineering work on the main road running between Benevento and Maddaloni and the areas forward thereof and about that time we participated in our first river crossing which was just north of the town of Agunziata as you can see that was

just a wide place in the road with a few houses. That's where we learnt that you can't build a rubber bridge until you take observed artillery fire off of the bridge site. there according to the plan of the operation observed fire was supposed to be taken off of the site by the attack by 8 o'clock in the morning and A Company was ordered to go in and build a bridge by 9 or 9:30. In order to get a bridge site they had to come across about half a mile of open road to get to Annuziata^K then make a turn and go over a half mile of open field - a little one track trail to get from town to rivers edge. Unfortunately the Germans hadn't learned that they were supposed to be out of the area by eight or nine and they had several self propelled that started shotting at the boys as they started coming out of the woods to come up the town with the result, as I recollect, that we had three trucks knocked out before we got into the town and then had several more knocked out before they got down to the waters edge. The Company got down and put their upstream cable in, we were rather afraid of that crossing so the company had been

pulled out and put into training for about a week so that they would be letter perfect or spend only the minimum time at the site not only that but we had the rubber boats already inflated and loaded on trucks so that all we had to do was get them to the water's edge and then throw them into the water in order to get the bridge up that much more quickly. However the bridge was getting shot out almost as rapidly as the floats were getting into the water. We went down to the bridge site with about 100% spares as I recollect of rubber pontons. When I saw that we didn't have enough to complete a bridge even if the Germans did stop shooting I pulled the Company out and I had to fall back to cover because they were suffering rather severe casualties during the shelling. It was impossible to move in the area for the rest of the day because as a matter of fact the German self propells were controlling that site all day long. and any movement called for fire immediately. That night A Company pulled out what equipment they had and they

drew some more from the division Engineers of the 311th Division and put a bridge across at a site a few miles up stream where there was no observed artillery fire. They put it across here at the town of Squille, as I recollect. The main difficulty there was your ^{one} approved road which was over the open ground of the open fields as down at Lunkenatta, while it doesn't show, you had a trail that came right to the waters' edge and you could have tied into this road on the other side.

After that - that was the first crossing of the Voltumo^{to} - we worked along the road from Caiasso North or was it west, Jix, west - we went near ^A Glife - Anatro. That's an old timer, walled town, we moved north along the road through Blvigano to Dragoni then we again crossed the Voltumo. In that distance between Caiasso and our second crossing^{to} of the Voltumo there was a whole series of blows where the Germans had just dumped the bridges, all the bridges in that area were stone bridges and they would not only blow the bridges but blow the

abutments so we had a review of bridge jobs to do. We had no bridging material so it was simply a case of getting your cats in bulldozing down so as to get a road over the blow. There was another interesting theory, the road in that section is along the side of a hill and through the center of these little towns which are very old and in many of them there is no bypass just this one road going through the middle of the town and there is at least one town, it seems to me there were two of them, where the Germans blew the houses down on each side of the road so as to create a road block and there is one in particular where Capt. Nichols of C Company, I thought pulled a rather smart stunt in that he put his bulldozers on top of the rubble with the result that your road came . . . until you came into the town then for a distance of several blocks you went up on a pile of rubble maybe 3/4 story high and when you got beyond where the houses had been blown in you came down to the grade again so that he could move his traffic back and forth while he cleaned a by-pass

then when he got his by-pass going he cleaned the road out and got it back to grade or cleaned the houses out. That was typical of the type of problem that we were running into when you have only one street going through a town and there is no way of getting around a town, the town being built on the side of a mountain. Well we had our second crossing at Dragoni that was difficult primarily because of the problem of keeping the bridge in the Germans had blown the masonry bridge, we maintained the armored bridge there for a while although Company B of the 16th Engineers, as I recollect, put it in. But we had the job of maintenance as well as the job of building the approaches which were about 50% of your bridging job many times your approaches were more difficult than the bridge itself. We then proceeded north till we came to (what is this road Jim? Here going through Alifi^e) It's the road through Alifi to Pratella, Pr^ata and down to Capriati. Alifi is quite interesting in that it is a very old town with a wall around it and I remember getting in there quite early while the infantry were fighting around it and thinking

what a God awful job it would be cleaning the town out because of the narrow streets and because so many of the houses had been blown down into the streets when I got the bright idea that I noticed a road that follows the wall and Tommy Farrell had A Company along about that time so he made a reconnaissance with his company and came up with the information that the road around the walls, around the outside of the walls was in perfect shape aside from a few mines and they had blown a few trees across the road but it took only a few hours to clean up and as far as I know no Engineers ever went into to the town to clean up we just used the road around the wall.

~~Col. Chubbuck: The town wasn't beat up. I ate through it.~~

Col. Gardes: I didn't get back in after that. Well, we continued the Engineer mission until we came to Capriati which is right across from ^{Venafro} ~~Benevento~~ where we had our third crossing of the ^{the} Volturno. There we were maintaining two bridges and this was in November when we were hitting the height of the rainy season and we had one God awful time because the

approaches to these bridges were under observation of the Germans, they were under almost continuous, not heavy fire, but this harassing fire which got both in day time and night, and at night and this bridge to the north of Capriati, remember we dropped off the side of a hill there into a flat which was flood land and the task that we had of keeping that road which was built across this field of black muck, just keeping the approaches open so that you could move traffic across there was terrific. That wasn't made any lighter by the fact that the Germans had observation on it, that they were shelling it intermittently. They also managed to get a bomber in once a day or so. We lost transportation, as I remember we lost a crane a bulldozer, we lost 4 or 5 tanks, it was also a nasty job because we were losing men right along. The losses might not have been heavy but we were losing them day after day - maybe one man today - nobody - to-morrow, then two or three the next day. It was one of those nasty

Col. Chubbuck: The main damage to our bridges though was done by the high water.

Col. Gardes: Yes. The armored force bridge just didn't stand up in

swift waters.

Col. Shotwell: You were closing your bridges with the treadways.

Col. Gardes &

Col. Chubbuck: Yes, the floating treadways.

Col. Gardes: I think we lost that upper bridge three different times. You see you're up in a mountain country there that there is a very little cover on a mountainside and in case of rain (and it had been raining several weeks at that time) your ground is saturated and your run off is about ninety-five percent of the rainfall. Well the water would just come down the canyons with a roar and the water would come up two or three feet in no time. One time it went out, I was down there, Joe Lombard was maintaining one of the bridges and there was a big tree trunk came sailing down stream. He had I think a one inch wire cable upstream of it as anchor cable, in addition to the ledge anchors. When the damn tree trunk hit the wire cable it just snapped. The tree trunk hit the bridge it had just slowed up a bit but that was enough for it to plow into the bridge and that was another bridge we lost. So then it was just a fight all the time to maintain the approaches and keep your bridges

in well from there we continued in support of the 34th Division swung north east from Venatro along 85 [Route] for a mile or so and then north again on this secondary road past Monte Kile or Cole, and it was at that point that we gave some support to the airborne. Remember the day that airborne outfit up there?

Col. Chubbuck: This is an interesting point while we are in this area. Do you see this road function up here at Venatro see the and practically right angle turn here/see this road up here at Cassino there is a stream running through here (Cassino) Too?

Col. Shotwell: Yes sir.

Col. Chubbuck: This apparently looks enough from the air like Cassino so that one flight of American bombers flying in from North Africa dropped their load right on this highway one day, you could see the bomb bay doors open and they got a lot of Americans then too.

Col. Gaydos: As I remember Jim - You, (Jim Chubbuck) and Walk were just around the corner here when that happened.

Col. Shotwell: A young Quartermaster officer who I am very friendly with he was our Ex up in New York was right there in the middle

of that road when that thing happened. He tried to hide under the roots of a tree. He said the only part he could get in was his head. (He is a little bit larger than you Jim).

Col. Chubbuck: It is interesting to see from the air how this does look like Cassino.

Col. Gardes: While there wasn't a great deal German Air there was enough to be very annoying they were out every day somewhere along the road shooting somebody up, they were in and out again.

Col. Gardes: After we reached ^{Colli} Colli on the Voltumo which is right here. The 54th Division was drawn back and it was replaced by the 2nd Moroccan Division and we remained in support of the 2nd Moroccan Division which was given the mission of attacking east along the road from ^{Colli} Colli to Atina a road which runs North of Cassino through the mountains. We remained in support of the French for several weeks when pulled back to Naples preparatory for Anzio. Some of our toughest engineering problems were encountered along this section of the road from Venafro ⁺ ^{Colli} Colli in that we were working in the mountainous country and at times were working several miles ahead of the infantry outpost lines when

we put in the so called "rugged bridge" which was quite a bridge over a gorge south of Coli, in order to get our bridging material we put a Bailey bridge in there but there was a bend in the road so we couldn't launch it from our side so we had to bring it across the Voltumo and beyond ^{Coli} Coli, which was our advance point, for a matter of a mile or more. See the Town of Coli is here, what we was across the Voltumo river down here, built a road to this road coming in from Isernia then had to pull a by-pass around two bridges in order to get our trucks into the town of Coli. Well Coli was our outpost line so we had to wait until night then run our trucks down here which is half a mile beyond the town out in the no man's land then bring them back along this road so that we could get our bridging material on the enemy's side of the gorge and launch the Bailey bridge from there. However before we could do that we had still a third bridge to put in. There is a little gorge the town of Coli sets on the side of a mountain and this lower road is down on the river level and there was a small bridge a three

span bridge about twenty-five feet long they called that the "Hot Spot Bridge" because it had eight direct hits on it while they were putting it up. You see this was right on the outpost line the Germans had observations on the bridge

Col. Chubbuck: Towards the Bailey.

Col. Gardes: No that was a timber bridge that we had to put so that at night could go over that road to bring our Bailey in. Once we got past that we could get down into the draw where we had some shelter which is on the site where we put the Bailey up. Then we launched The Bailey from the enemy's side back to our own. What we did when we were going out into no man's land like that was to get the assistance of the infantry in that particular case we were working with the 34th Division which were just about as fine an outfit co-operatively as we ever ran into and they made available to us their reconnaissance company. So they moved their reconnaissance cars out the night before we made this run out beyond the town to the fork of the road and then back

again down the lower road to get our materials in and they had some armored cars out in no man's land outposting us for that little maneuver. Nevertheless it was still quite an ^{serie} ~~syde~~ affair. Shall I say? As you are driving a 2 1/2 ton 6 X 6 out beyond your outpost line to a road junction and then coming back again. But the thing was run off successfully. It was quite a difficult job to say the least.

That was an example of a lot of the problems we had. I think your problems ought to be summed up or high lighted by a study that Bill Ryback made when we were up around Coli. It wasn't exactly a study what he did was to go over his records. We had repaired or built some 58 bridges or culverts, making repairs where the Germans had blown out structures. Of those I think two of them were floating bridges, three of them were Bailey bridges, there was that Rugged Bridge, there was one just out, just after the breakout from Salerno and there was one other, that's about five maybe one or two others. But I think that there were about eighty structures that we built or repaired with just what we could scrounge off the country side. There was no Bailey bridging available other people had priority for

what little you had in Italy. There is no standing timber in that country to speak of. You had your engineers going into the doughboys on reconnaissance looking for something they could use for bridging materials and on several occasions like one bridge west of Scapoli some poor Italian made the tactical error of building his house too near the blow so that when we had to get materials for a quick repair I'm afraid that the bulldozers just pushed his house down into the gorge or into the gully, as part of the fill. All we could do was make a culvert the culvert was never adequate, it was never big enough to carry the run-off in the heavy rains but God when you don't have material you just made a small culvert which would carry off part of the water. If you lost the by-pass you just put in another one in.

That about covers it because about the first of the year we were relieved from the support of the 2nd Moroccan Division and moved back to Naples.

Col. Chubbuck: A side light on the things you had to do in Combat Engineers just outside Scapoli we had to run our ~~construction materials~~ ^{combat materials}

~~and other~~
~~and other~~ administrative. I sat as president of a special court one day trying some of the minor cases, some cases of absence without leave and we ran through cases in about thirteen minutes each. Not that we were slighting anything but the Germans were shelling a French battery just a couple of hundred yards beyond us and the shells were just going over the little building in which we were holding our court.

Col. Gardes: I think you can appreciate this. Our bivouac area at the time was right in the midst of the division artillery of the French Division and when they got counter-battery we of course shared in it. However, ours was the safest spot we could find because we were down in a draw there and we did have some defilade to protect us.

One other thing the entire trail from Salerno up to Colli was made extremely difficult by the large number of mines. The Germans not only blew the bridges but they would put teller mines in the debris if you went ~~it~~ with a cat you were liable to lose the cat. They also mined the shoulders of the road. They mined the fields. Everything was mined.

They had had adequate time to prepare these different lines of defense so that we lived continually in an area of mines. There was one other thing in addition to mines, Jim. There were mines and being in a mountain country and in the rainy season you couldn't get off the road and when you did the road at the best was what you might call a $1\frac{1}{2}$ lane road which was adequate in the day time but we were operating in the forward areas where there was always at least a part of the regiment working in an area that you couldn't get into in day time. You just had to do your work at night and most of the movement over those roads was at night and was black-out you didn't have to urge people to black out they blacked out of their own volition.

Col. Chubbuck: Sicily is particularly ^{notable} ~~susceptible~~ for black out. When trucks were hauling a considerable distance inland it was guaranteed to take five year off your life to . . .
on a narrow road in a black out at night ~~to~~
meet one of those ~~ducks~~

Col. Gardes: Well here you had narrow roads and deep ditches the roads were made for carts and light vehicular traffic like that whereas we were moving M-4 tanks, heavy trucks, and prize

movers which were beating them up the vehicles coming in out of the fields and the draws where they were dispersed in the daytime were hauling all the burden of mud with them so that the roads were covered with mud at all times. It just made the engineering task extremely difficult plus the fact that you had mines everywhere. Oh the other thing I was thinking of was the improvement of the German combat engineers. In Sicily all they would do would be to blow the crown out of a bridge leaving perfectly good abutments to work with by the time we got up to Italy they not only blew the span, they also blew the abutments and then left a few mines in what was left of the abutments. And it occurred to me many times and it must have occurred to the other men that the German demolition men must have had Bailey bridge cards in their pockets because it seemed that the blow would always take the next longer length of Bailey bridge when we could get Bailey bridge. They were constantly doing a bang up job of blowing.

Col. Shotwell: By the way did you get much, did you use much of that bridging stuff that was found around Battipaglia?

Col. Gardes: No we didn't get any of that.

Col. Shotwell: There were about 30,000 tons of Roth Wagoner bridging found at Battipaglia.

Col. Gardes: No we moved through Battipaglia in quite a hurry because that was right after the break out and the demand for Engineers forward exceeded the number of people we had so it was a question of getting our people forward as quickly as possible. There weren't bridge timbers there. I heard some kind of rumor of hiding there.

Col. Shotwell: It was steel bridging

Col. Gardes: Oh it was steel bridging

Col. Shotwell: The light steel ^{Meccano} Vescaanno type.

Col. Gardes: What we had done was when we were back in Bizerti had been to draw some bridge timbers, heavy timbers. In fact we had started that back in Morocco. Each time we had used timber You see the regiment was equiped with trailers then and each time we stopped and needed to use timber we would use it off those trailers then the first place we get to where we could replace it we would replace it with material. In Italy it was what we could scrounge off the ground because the corps and army dumps never gave us a hand. When we

came back from Sicily to Bizerte, it seems to me, that we were able to stock up again and those bridge timbers we had were really a godsend because they were worth their weight in gold. I was talking to Col. Coffee the other day, Col. Jim Coffee who was in command of the 109th the division Engineers for the 34th Division. It worked quite closely with us during this period when we were going up from Salerno and he is now just down the hall from me in the Pentagon and I ran into him on Friday and we were chatting about this area and he said that one thing he noticed about the regiments were those timbers we were carrying around on our trailers and that after that the 109 acquired trailers and when they could beg, borrow, or steal anything that looked like it might be useful for bridging they built up their bridge train that way.