

I added this at the front of the 540TH book -
'OVERSEAS WITH THE 540TH ENGINEERS'.

This book was not very well liked by many members of the
540th, believe me!

Sincerely,
Bill Henon

FOREWORD

Many of the members of the 540TH, myself included, are of the opinion that this book does not do justice to the accomplishments and experiences of the line companies of the regiment. The many hardships that we endured, incidents of our invasion participations, our support of various infantry divisions, etc are barely touched upon or completely ignored. A stranger looking at this book, would think that we spent most of our time living in chateaus, hotels, villas, etc. For the Headquarters and H & S groups, this for the most part, was true. Throughout most of the War, the men in the line companies slept on the ground, in holes, in caves, in pup tents, etc.

This book of the 540TH is the regiment's participation in the War, as seen through the eyes of Headquarters and H & S. Too many pages are filled with pictures of their living quarters or the men of these two groups. Several hundred men of the regiment were killed or wounded during the course of the War by artillery, mines, bombs or small arms fire. This sure as hell didn't happen living in chateaus or villas!

Following are some of the many incidents remembered: *BY ME*

- The North Africa invasion - The 540TH 1st Battalion in support of the 9TH Division, 60TH Inf. Regt. Capt. Verle McBride of B Co., leading a provisional

assault company of 125 engineers made up of 540TH and 9TH Div men, in an attack on the Kasbah(an old stone fortress).

- Ed McCracken, our first platoon lieutenant, seriously wounded. Received the DSC. Never saw him again until after the War.
- The Sicily landings at Licata and Gela - For awhile it looked like we were going to be pushed off the beaches at Gela by the Germans. The big guns of the Navy saved the day! Men of the 82nd Airborne being shot down over us by our own gunfire during the first night on the beachhead.
- The 2nd Battalion participating in two behind the lines landings, along the north coast of Sicily, in support of the 7TH Inf Regt, 3rd Div. Several casualties on second landing, among them a buddy of mine from E Co., John Bush, who was killed. Floyd Arvin of E Co. received the DSC for gallantry in action!
- Leo Tupper, our 1st platoon lieutenant, blown apart by a mine while we were clearing a mine field in Sicily.
- The Italian Campaign - The Salerno landing was rough, with the outcome not decided for several days. F Co. supporting a Ranger battalion on an end-around landing at Maori, above Salerno.
- Naples, crawling through sewers and searching buildings for mines and time bombs. 36TH Engrs lost many men when time bomb exploded in Main post office.
- Leaving Naples and on our way up to support the British near Sessa. Camped out in open field(why I'll never know) along Messerschmitt Lane. Strafed

several times in this area by ME 109's. Pete Polanski dives in latrine slit trench to avoid being hit and crawls out covered with you know what! Six months later on the Anzio Beachhead, Pete is shot in the back by small arms fire while relieving himself of you know what!

- B Co. clearing hundreds of mines along Italy's west coast while attached to the British. Charlie Knorr and I nearly buy the farm. The pair of us are working together, clearing a minefield. Charlie just about to raise his foot under a trip wire attached to a Teller mine, when I see the wire and holler. One more step and that would have been the end for us. Charlie was wounded a year and a half later during the Rhine crossing and died in a hospital, three weeks later and only three weeks before the end of the War!
- Up on a mountainside near Sessa. I was sent back to a hospital in Capua with an ulcer. Ten days later, back to my unit on the mountain and ulcer again bothering me. Battalin doctor gives me a dozen large pills and tells me to take them all at once. Damn near killed me! Stole a case of evaporated milk and that's all that I ate for several days. My ulcer heals up.
- New Years day, 1944. Snowing and I'm sitting in a cave with wool gloves on my feet, all of my boots are soaked. Has rained nearly every day for the past two months. Mud is unbelievable! At midnight we go down mountainside and back down south to Pazzoli, outside of Naples, to train for another amphibious landing, we think.

- The Anzio Beachhead - The landing was a quiet one, but in a few days all hell broke loose! You could say that it was "hell on earth" for the next four months. F Co. back in Anzio, had heavy losses during the four months, mainly from bombs and artillery fire. My company(B) was on flank, 5 miles from Anzio, near the Mussolini Canal. We lived in holes in the ground for 4 months.
- Our platoon lieutenant and I didn't see eye-to-eye, so I was sent to the 2nd platoon in exchange for Bill Krusely. Here I lucked out again! Krusely was wounded several months later in France and again in Germany during the Rhine crossing(God bless him wherever he is).
- Anzio, April 25, 1944 - Hitler's 55th birthday. Germans bombed and shelled us non-stop for 24 hours. Buried ammo shells in woods back of our position in ravine, hit by kraut artillery fire. Ammo exploded all night and landing on us, so we were being shelled from both the front and back! Personnel bombs also being dropped on us. A long night.
- Breakout at Anzio and up north through Rome to Piombino where we clear out a pocket of Germans and then straightened out Piombino.
- The Southern France landing - I was with special underwater demolition outfit attached to our Navy. We attacked St. Raphael head on but were driven off by German fire. We then backed off after several attempts to land and went in further on down the coast, where our 1st Battalion had landed in the morning with the 141st Infantry regt. We secured St. Raphael the next morning after

clearing out some sniper fire. F Co. was again unlucky, having 23 men killed or wounded during the Southern France operation.

- Alsace and Lorraine - It was a hard, cold winter in northeastern France. The regiment had been maintaining a line near the German border, for several days before and after Christmas. Troops from the 6TH SS Mountain Division attacked us on New Years Eve. C Co. had several men taken prisoner and several trapped behind enemy lines. After rescuing what was left of a cavalry recon company, we(B Co.) held ridge above Mouterhouse for most of New Years Day 1945. We finally retreated late in the afternoon, some of us riding out on the tops of tanks. Then got stalled on a long hill and Germans strafed and bombed us, using captured U.S. P 40's, and as a result of this, sustained several casualties. I believe that was the longest 24 hour day of my life!
- January 1945 - Expecting Germans to attack near Ingwiller, we started to lay out a large mine field at our end of an open plain surrounded by forests. We(B Co.) were backed up by about a dozen tank destroyers, stretched out about fifty yards behind us. A blizzard soon came up, heaviest snowfall that I have ever seen. At least a foot in a couple of hours. A Kraut patrol walked right through us and also through the TD's right behind us. They were later captured back in Ingwiller.
- Our platoon building a small bridge by moonlight, German recon plane overhead. A few hours later, Krauts bombed and destroyed the bridge.

- February 1945 - One day for about ten hours straight, we are laying mines and putting up heavy barbed wire obstacles because of an expected German attack. My hands are bleeding from handling the barbed wire and it's very cold and snowing. A company of infantry, the 78TH Inf Div, moves in right behind us. Darkness sets in and our platoon pulls out, leaving only Malky Kay with a machine gun and a detonator to blow up a small bridge at the site. We come back next morning and the infantry has pulled out but Malky is still there with his machine gun. All of the barbed wire and several of the mines have been blown up during the night by Kraut mortar fire, but no breakthrough has occurred. All that work for nothing!
- Laying on an iced-over creek all night in snow and near zero weather, between our line and Germans(why on the ice, we never knew). Ready to go AWOL! Next morning our company is pulled out of there and goes to support the 179TH Inf Regt(45TH Div).
- Rhine River crossing at Worms - F Co. again unlucky with heavy losses, 39 men killed or wounded. Total regiment losses, 55 men.
- During the course of the War, F Co. suffered 65% casualties(figuring approx 200 men and officers per company). The medical detachment followed with 35% casualties and the other line companies, each with 15% to 20% casualties.
- The last 2 1/2 months of the War, I spent with the 14TH Armored Division as a member of the 125TH Armored Engr Battalion. A completely different type

of operation. A couple of times we (infantry and engineers) got so far ahead of the rest of our combat command (division divided into three combat commands), that we were shelled by our own artillery moving up in back of us. Also strafed by our own planes, even though our tanks and vehicles were plainly marked with bright colored banners. I became very sick around the middle of April. We were about to attack Bamberg when I was sent to a field hospital and it was soon shell-ed. Put us in ambulances that night and while on the road, we were bombed. After two or three days they got us on a plane and we flew back to France on an over-the-treetops flight!

- Second day in the hospital - Nurse tells me that a man from my company is down the hall from me. Go to see him and it was our company commander's jeep driver. He had been shot in the leg, the company commander had been killed and 33 men from my company were taken prisoner. Again I lucked out!

And so it comes to an end. There are many more incidents similar to these, that men of the 540TH will always remember. Hopefully mine will give to any person reading this book, an insight into some of the the things that happened to us during World War II.

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AN AFTERTHOUGHT - added to what I have previously written

- After we had been on the Anzio Beachhead for several weeks, the Germans began to infiltrate our lines at nighttime. They caused considerable damage to equipment and killed several men in the motor pools of various outfits(ours included), that were located quite some distance from us, back along the shore line. One night the squad that I was in, was sent out on patrol, hoping to intercept Kraut infiltrators. After walking along a rutted dirt road for awhile, we heard a slight movement ahead of us. It was pitch dark and we came to a complete stop, Our squad sgt, Sam Consolo, called out the first word of our daily password(the password was changed each day and always consisted of two words). After a few seconds of silence, the second word of the password was called out by whoever was in front of us. It was a U.S. patrol from the 894th Tank Destroyer battalion. We started conversing with them and I thought that I recognized one of their voices. It belonged to Cliff Connolly, a life-long friend of mine from my hometown, Rocky River, Ohio. We had both pitched on the same high school team for three years and had played on the same American Legion and area sandlot teams for several years. How close we came to possibly shooting each other!! An incident that I'll never forget.
- I saw Cliff again on May 22, 1944, the day before we finally broke out of the Anzio Beachhead. His outfit was positioned near our company and while I was talk-

ing with him, the Krauts started shelling our position. I took off from there in a hurry and as I left, I said to Cliff "I'll see you again sometime, buddy". That was the last time that I ever saw him. He was killed four ⁿmoths later, near Florence, Italy. God bless him.