

The following is a compilation of handwritten notes made during an interview with my Dad, Henry John Dieken, in 1975 I think.

John H. Dieken

Henry John Dieken was sworn into the U.S. Army on February 13, 1942. However, his records show February 12th. His serial number was 37144222. He was sworn in at Sioux Falls, South Dakota and from there he was shipped to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

At Fort Leavenworth he spent 5 or 6 days, received a physical, clothing, etc.

Following Fort Leavenworth he was shipped to Camp Forrest, Tennessee where he was assigned to the 123rd Field Artillery, 33rd Division, "A" Company. This was still in February of 1942.

On the 3rd or 4th of August 1942 he was sent to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts on Washburn Island where he was assigned to the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment of the 1st Amphibious Brigade. He was assigned to "F" Company in the 2nd Battalion. Note:

- 5 platoons of 70 men made up a company
- 3 companies made up a Battalion
- 2 Battalions made up a Regiment
- 4 Regiments made up a Division
- 2 Divisions made up a Brigade

In October 1942 he was sent to a camp in Virginia. There really was no camp, just a bivouac area. The nickname for this camp was Camp Slough. It was located south of Newport News and North of Fort Story next to some CB Base. This was the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment that was sent to this camp. The rest of the 1st Amphibious Brigade was sent to the Pacific Theatre of the war. This regiment however, was slated for and did go to North Africa. The outcome of all of this was that after the war and ever since, whenever inquires about the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment were made to the service they immediately start looking under the 1st Amphibious Brigade and the Pacific Theatre of the war and invariably report back that the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment did not ship overseas or worst did not ever exist.

In late October of 1942 the whole Regiment shipped out except "F" Company. They shipped out from Newport News for Africa. "F" Company remained behind to pickup the AWOLs and some heavy equipment and in turn were sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

In November of 1942, "F" Company went by train to New York City from Fort Bragg arriving at the Harbor. There they loaded all the equipment on a ship called "The Passaguyala" (Spelling is mine and is not correct but is phonetically the way my Dad pronounced it.) This was a cargo ship.

In December of 1942 "F" Company set sail. They were about 250 miles out of New York at a place called torpedo junction when some "green" engineer on the ship opened the saltwater seacocks and let saltwater into the boilers. In order to recover, the whole ship had to be shut down. There was no air, no power, no heat, no lights, etc. They were adrift at sea in an area that required radio silence and there was a storm coming up. After about 3 days the main part of the storm hit. The Captain was able to garner enough power the first night to keep the ship headed into the storm. The next morning he let out the anchor on the starboard side to keep the ship headed into the storm. Late in the afternoon the anchor snagged on something on the seabed. The crew then proceeded to let out chain at each large swell approximately 75 feet at a time, until they reached the end. There were some swells that were over the stacks and they put water into the furnaces. When the end of the anchor chain was reached it broke and the Captain let out the port side anchor. The same thing happened and the next morning the storm got worst, some of the men were washed overboard.

The Captain then let out the fantail anchor. Prior to doing that, and while they were drifting and turning the ship around, the ship had lists of 44, 42 and 40 degrees. At the same time a bulldozer broke loose from its moorings in the #2 hold. While it was ramming around in the hold with each toss of the ship and smashing everything up, its blade tore a hole in the side of the ship and hung up. Now they were also taking on water and the Captain ordered the bulkheads secured.

The fantail anchor caught on the bottom next. It wasn't on a chain but instead was on a cable and the swells made the cable sing like a banjo string. Each time slack was let out and when evening of that day came the end of the line was reached. At sundown the winch broke away from the deck and a plane was spotted and flashed but the ship's flash was not seen. Two hours later the storm started to subside and they managed to get one engine up and running. The Captain used this to keep the ship headed into the storm.

When morning broke a patrol plane was spotted and flashed. This time the flash was seen and the message taken and in turn, a tug was sent out. Meanwhile power from the one operating engine was improved and the ship begins to make 2 knots an hour by nightfall.

The next afternoon late in the day the tug arrives but the Skipper and the tugboat Captain got in an argument over salvage claims and the Skipper refused to throw a line. The Captain of the tugboat was going to lay salvage claims on the ship if it towed it in. The ship continued to travel on its own power but it was listing seriously to the starboard side. The tug Captain didn't give up on his prize and shadowed the ship as it made way.

During the early evening orders were given that the ship was putting into port in New York Harbor at pier 9 and all were to be ready to disembark in the morning.

At 2300 hours, orders were given to disembark in 45 minutes. The ship was listing bad. At midnight they entire ship unloaded at pier #9 on Staten Island and were taken to Fort Dix for the night.

The next morning when they went to get the heavy equipment off of the ship they found it sunk at the pier. All of the survivors got 90 days of survivors' leave except "F Company" which remained at Fort Dix. Remember they were made up of the stragglers and AWOLs. Between Christmas and New Year's the men of "F Company" loaded out on the ship the "Santa Maria" which was a Cuban passenger liner ship.

They set sail for Casablanca and after 14 days at sea they arrived. This was in January of 1943. The rest of the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment was between Casablanca and Rabat in French Morocco. They fought on to Oran, Algeria; to Algiers, Algeria; and to Bizerte, Tunisia. They reached the Caserne Pass but were pulled back and re-equipped with ducks and amphibious trucks and then they were sent to Sicily. The two Battalions of the Regiment were separated and on the 9th of July 1943 the 1st Battalion went ashore at Gela and the 2nd Battalion went ashore at Licata, Sicily. Once Sicily was secured the Regiment was put ashore at the Salerno beachhead south of Naples, Italy. This was in August 1943.

From there they pushed up the coast going by boat to Niordi where they linked up with the rangers and went to Chintz Pass. Together they fought in what was called the Naples – Foggia Campaign all the way up to Casino. Then the 540th was pulled back and sent to Salerno to be re-equipped. From there they were shipped to the Anzio Nettuno beachhead arriving in January 1944. They pushed on up through Rome and north to Civitavecchia arriving in June of 1944.

Once again they were pulled back. This time to St. Amara which was north of Naples and re-equipped and re-enforced.

In July or August of 1944 they were shipped to Southern France and put ashore at Marseille. From there they pushed north to Lyon. At Lyon their designation was changed to the 2nd Combat Engineer Amphibious Battalion. A lot of men had been lost and the regiment now was only battalion size. The 2nd Combat Engineer Amphibious Battalion was assigned to the 2833rd Regiment and together they pushed up the Rome River Valley and on to Metz

Prior to crossing the river at Metz the remaining men of the 540th Amphibious Engineer Regiment now the 2nd Combat Engineer Amphibious Battalion were assigned to Headquarters Company of the 2833rd Regiment and labeled the Signal Corp.

They crossed the Rhine River at Worms, Germany in July of 1945 and drove south to Munich. Then the war ended and in August 1945 Henry was headed home. From Munich he traveled by train to Southern France then was put aboard a B-17 to Casablanca. There he was put aboard a C-54 to Santa Maria in the Azores. From there they flew on to Bermuda landing with 3 engines out. (Dad didn't much like flying after that.) Soon they arrived in Miami and he was put aboard a train to Chicago. Once he arrived in Chicago, Illinois he reported to Camp McCoy. He was told that because he was combat experienced he was being shipped out to the Pacific where the war was still

going on and they needed experienced combat soldiers. After turning over 3 or 4 desks in the orderly room and putting all the personnel who worked in the orderly room up against the wall. The men in Dad's group told the responding Captain that they had done their time in hell and they would spend the rest of their days in the stockade, that each of the bastards in the orderly room would take their turn at combat first. The Captain, a combat veteran himself, signed the papers and they were discharged that same day August 14, 1945. Dad was discharged with the rank of Tech Sergeant (E-4) from the 2833rd Combat Engineer Battalion.

After getting out of the service Dad went to work for the VA Hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota as a carpenter. He lived at home in Hartford, South Dakota and met and dated Ida Clark. They got married in February 1947.

In the summer of 1947 Henry left the VA and went into business for himself as a plasterer.

In the fall of 1949 he had an accident when the tie rods on the truck he had, broke. He broke his shoulder and could no longer plaster ceilings. After his shoulder healed he went to work as an Ironworker during the winter of 1949.

In 1950 he took a job with the town of Hartford as their Day Man/Police Chief in Hartford, South Dakota.

Then in 1951 he went to work for Delbert Peters of Peters Construction Company of Hartford, South Dakota as a carpenter in General Construction work.

In 1952 Henry took on running a Phillips 66 service station on the west side of Hartford and ran it until the summer of 1959. He had given out too much credit and while he had the funds on the books as accounts receivable, folks were not paying their bills and he could no longer pay his overhead. Also it was at this time that his health began to fail.

When he was a kid Henry was raking corn down out of a corncrib into a corn sheller. Carbon Monoxide gas from the sheller filled the crib and Dad passed out. He was in a coma for three days as a result of this. Later in the service station which had 2 stalls, one with a hoist for lifting cars and another with a pit for pulling trucks over and a man would go down into the pit and work on the underside, he had another bout with carbon monoxide poisoning. This happened in the wintertime. Dad was working in the pit. His helper had just finished doing an oil change on a car on the hoist, lowered it, started the car and was getting ready to pull it outside when the bell for the gas pump rang. In those days the station attendant pumped all the gas. The man left the car running in the stall next to the one where Dad was working in the pit and went out to service the car that had pulled up to the pumps. One thing led to another, another customer came and before long Dad realized he was getting gassed again. He managed to crawl out of the pit and across the floor to the garage door, which was a roll-type door, made up of a series of windows, and break the bottom pane out with a hammer. That was where they found him. Dad was always active in the community and served as a volunteer fireman. On one occasion

during this time frame there was a fire in the motor at the top of the conveyer system in the Farmers Elevator. Knowing that if it wasn't put out it could cause the whole building to blow up, the firemen decided to put on air packs and go up to the top of the elevator and put it out using a new device fire departments were using – foam. This foam was made by using carbon tetrachloride, and unfortunately not a whole lot was known about it. Today it is banned because exposure to its fumes causes large rope like scars in a person's lungs. Dad's facemask to his air pack didn't fit tight and he got exposed to the carbon tetrachloride fumes, but they got the fire out. He was sick for about a week or so it seemed. But added to the two carbon monoxide poisonings and the fact that Dad smoked, and that he smoked roll-your-owns all his life, his days of health were numbered.

After he gave up his service station business, Henry applied to work as a concrete finisher for Dakota Construction in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Believing in a full day's work for a full day's pay, Hank always cleaned his tools after the end of the day and then left for home. This didn't set well with the union, which was quite strong back then. They took the approach that you cleaned your tools while you were still on the clock not afterwards. After his probationary period Henry was let go. That was in the fall of 1959.

Next Henry tried his hand at selling McNess farm products farm to farm. This didn't work out and in the spring of 1960 he left McNess and went into business doing contract painting, painting houses and farm buildings. He did that all during the summer of 1960 and then in the fall went to work for Freddie Meyers as a truck driver hauling grain and livestock to market for area farmers. Henry was earning \$50.00 a week and supporting a wife and seven kids.

In 1961 he was hired by the town of Hartford to once again be their Day Man/Chief of Police.

In 1966 the City of Dell Rapids, South Dakota hired him as a policeman. In the spring of 1967 they promoted him to Chief of Police with two full time officers and five part-time officers.

In 1973 Henry stepped down from the Chief of Police position due to health reasons and in 1974 he was medically retired from the Dell Rapids Police Force. I should say released from the Dell Rapids Police Force for medical reasons as he never drew a cent in retirement from the City of Dell Rapids, he only drew medical social security.

Henry John Dieken died November 22, 1977 in the VA Hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota of pulmonary emphysema.