

More on the 343rd:

As most of you know, the 343rd Engineers was activated at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana on the 22nd of April 1942. In the space of a few weeks, the ranks were filled by the transfer of Training Cadres from organized National Guard Units, officers who had been personally selected by Col. Dunbar, and civilian soldiers, who made up the bulk of the Regimental Personnel. After training for a month in Camp Claiborne and another month at Camp Dix in New Jersey, the Regiment embarked for Foreign Service from New York on July 1st, 1942 and landed at Glasgow, Scotland on the 13th of July.

It was assigned a permanent station at Nettlebed, England, near the resort town of Henley-on-Thames. It's first activity on foreign soil was the construction of a Regimental Camp. After that, the 343rd entered into a vast construction program, including the building of hospitals, quartermaster depots, warehouses for various Army Services, and large bivouac installations for the housing of American Troops that would be arriving in the future.

In October 1942, the Regiment was divided into two echelons. While the 2nd Battalion and Headquarters remained in England, the 1st Battalion embarked to join the initial convoy headed for the invasion of North Africa. They arrived and landed at Mers-El-Kabir on the 11th of November 1942, and immediately started the work of clearing mines, debris, and booby trap installations from this harbor as well as the Port of Oran.

The 2nd Battalion and Regimental Headquarters, after embarking from Liverpool, England, landed in North Africa in early December 1942. The Entire Regiment then went into Bivouac at Canastel, a few miles east of Oran. Operating as one unit from this area the 343rd continued on the many engineering projects assigned to it. These included the building of hospitals, one with a capacity of 6,400 beds, the laying of railroad tracks, and construction of technical assembly lines for heavy equipment.

In early January of 1943, the Regiment was attached to the newly organized 5th Army, and continued working on construction projects in the Oran-Canastel areas. Shortly after being assigned to the 5th Army, our Company "F" was moved into Oujda, Morocco and given special engineering tasks. In March 1943, the Regiment, less Company "F", was relieved of it's duties with the 5th Army, assigned to the Eastern Base Section, and ordered East into the Constantine area. Company "A" remained in Bou Hanifia to complete a large General Hospital. Companies "C" and "D" remained at Chaunzy to finish the construction of facilities for an extensive prisoner of war camp. Within a short period of time these Companies also arrived in the Eastern Base Section, and moved on into Tunisia.

In Southern Tunisia, the lines of Communications into the II Corps area were the Regiment's major responsibility. As a consequence, operations included constant mine sweeping of roads and railway beds, construction of bridges, and continual repairs to the miles of roads that had literally disintegrated under the pressures of Army vehicle traffic. In particular, the Companies followed closely behind Division Engineers clearing mine fields at Jefna and keeping roads open in the combat area near Hill 609.

At the close of the Tunisian Campaign the Regiment went into bivouac at Ferryville and began the task of harbor clearance for this city and the facilities in Bizerta with day and night diving operations. Also, numerous landing berths were constructed for "LCT" Craft that were to be shortly used in the invasion of Sicily. During this period Company "F" arrived from Oujda, where it's work had included the construction of all installations necessary for Army Headquarters Operation, May/June 1943.