

History of the 207th Engineer Combat Battalion, 1943-1945

The 147th Engineer Combat Regiment, parent unit of the 207th Engineer Combat Battalion, was first activated at Camp Swift, located near the town of Bastrop, Texas, on 29 January 1943. The regiment was split up at Camp Swift on 1 April 1943, and its 2d Battalion became the 207th Engineer Combat Battalion. Major John W. Burfening (promoted to lieutenant colonel in May 1944), assumed command of the battalion in July 1943 and retained it until the end of the war in Europe. The battalion participated in exercises in the Louisiana Maneuver Area between 8 June and 27 August 1943, and then returned to Camp Swift for additional training. It moved to Camp Shanks, New York, in mid-November, preparatory to sailing to Great Britain from the New York Port of Embarkation on 3 December 1943.

The battalion landed at Grennock, Scotland, on 9 December 1943 and proceeded to Devizes, Wiltshire, in southern England. It moved to Nuffield, Oxfordshire, on 24 December 1943 and then to Larkstoke Camp in the same county on 2 March 1944. The battalion was attached to the 1110th Engineer Combat Group on 3 March 1944 and served with that headquarters for most of the remainder of the war.

The battalion crossed over to Utah Beach in three segments from 16 June to 28 June 1944. The second contingent suffered a number of casualties when LST 523, in which it was crossing the English Channel, struck a mine and sank on 19 June. At the end of July four members of the battalion were known to have been killed in this mishap and fourteen others were still listed as missing. The battalion in late June built a two-way, class 40, timber trestle bridge at Carentan in support of VII Corps's drive north up the Cotentin Peninsula toward Cherbourg.

The 207th supported three divisions in turn during July 1944 as VIII Corps drove down the Atlantic littoral of Normandy in the area around La Haye-du-Puits. The battalion supported the 90th Infantry Division during 2-10 July, the 79th Infantry Division during 11-15 July, and the 8th Infantry Division during 16-27 July 1944. After First Army broke through the German lines in northwestern France in late July, the battalion engaged in road maintenance and bridge building for it as its lead elements moved quickly across northern France. The 72-foot long, two-way class 40, pile bridge which the battalion completed at Tribehou on 5 August; the 306-foot, class 40, floating Bailey bridge which the it completed across the Oise River at Compiègne on 1 September; and the class 70, timber-pile bridge which it built there on 4-10 September, were noteworthy examples of the battalion's efforts.

The 207th moved to southern Belgium on 11 September 1944, where it continued its road and bridge work. During October it also began lumbering operations, running sawmills at Theux and Malmedy. The battalion headquarters moved to Herzogenrath, Germany, near Aachen, on 28 October and on 11 November the

battalion took over the maintenance of the main supply route of VII Corps as it pushed through the Huertgen Forest toward the Roer River.

When the Germans launched a strong attack in the Ardennes in mid-December 1944, the battalion was quickly returned to Belgium to build defensive positions between Ciney and Dinant near the Meuse River. Three members of Company C of the battalion were awarded Bronze Stars for their actions on 24 December 1944 when ten German tanks broke through a roadblock set up by the 207th, with the loss of one of the tanks. The 2d Armored Division soon pushed the Germans back south of Ciney, and after 25 December the battalion maintained its barrier without further contact with the enemy. The battalion shifted its focus in January 1945 to keeping roads in the Ardennes clear of ice and snow and to operating a rock quarry and six sawmills there. The battalion built a 48-foot, one-way class 40, H-10 bridge near Marche, Belgium.

On 10 February the battalion took charge of maintaining Route N-31, V Corps's main supply route, between Eupen, Belgium, and Monschau, Germany. The road had been so damaged by thaws and heavy military traffic that the battalion had to lay more than 6 miles of one-way corduroy to keep the road passable. Fortunately, an abundance of logs could be obtained from the surrounding forests. The battalion also laid pierced-steel plank on the unbroken sections of the road to protect them.

The 207th completed its road maintenance work on 12 March and then began preparing for its role in the bridging of the Rhine River. After maintaining a Bailey Bridge park for a week, the 207th joined with the 148th Engineer Combat Battalion on 25 March to build an 1173-foot floating Bailey bridge across the Rhine at Bad Godesberg, just south of Bonn. The 207th built the western 530-foot section of this bridge, and it removed 14,000 cubic feet of earth for the construction of the west approach road, a task which was completed by a third battalion. The floating bridge was supported by large anchored barges, and it could carry 70 tons in one lane and 40 tons in the other. After its completion on 5 April, the bridge soon became the main route for First Army traffic across the Rhine.

The 207th removed floating treadway bridges across the Rhine at nearby Bonn and Rolandseck and a heavy ponton bridge at Koenigswinter during 8-12 April 1945, after they were no longer needed. For the next two weeks it maintained security at all Rhine River installations at Bonn and Bad Godesberg. It was moved on 26 April to Ansbach near Nuremberg, where it took over road maintenance responsibilities. The battalion was inactivated in Germany on 25 November 1945.