

# *Inseparable* **BONDS** *Of* **Engineer Service**

*By Colonel Michael Morgan, USA (Ret)  
with great help from Mari Ippolito,  
Marion Chard and Gene Kuentzler*



*297th Combat Engineer Battalion WWII buddies  
relax during the war. Some remain united today.  
(Photo courtesy Mari Ippolito)*

**I**t's only a symbol of a single branch of service within the United States Army, but the power that symbol has to bring forth strong feelings of pride and solidarity is noteworthy. The symbol is the Army Engineer Castle. The "Castle" is a primary component of Army uniforms worn by officers and enlisted personnel, signifying their branch of service. It has been, and remains today, a central focus on red and white, large and small flags flown outside governmental office buildings, on home lawns of veterans, on field-expedient flag poles near forward operating bases, as a part of framed service mementos hanging in places of honor in offices and homes, and on military vehicles everywhere. The Engineer Castle has been hand-fabricated in brick, concrete, metal, stone and wood. It's been used as a part of "headquarters" signs in so many locations throughout history, that an entire book of photographs could be compiled in that regard. In sum, it's a powerful image and few (if any) others of similar purpose can match it in terms of visibility and meaning.

*Continued on next page*



Perhaps it's because the Corps of Engineers has a history going back to the earliest days of the United States. Perhaps it's because the Corps of Engineers has not only a military role, but also a "civil" role in relationship to various aspects of nation building. Lastly, perhaps it's because of the aura surrounding something as solid and everlasting as a "castle". Whatever the reasons, veterans of Army Engineer service, military and civilian, are emotionally connected in many ways as a result of having been associated in some form or fashion with the organization the "castle" represents.

Army Engineer veterans demonstrate their solidarity and pride of service in many ways. Some unite with comrades during annual reunions, some design and manage websites which focus on specific unit history and traditions, some write books or articles describing their special time in service, while still others stay in touch with close friends made while serving as an Army Engineer, through letters, cards, group luncheons or dinners, and similar social activities.

This article will take a brief look at some of the people involved in helping to maintain the history and traditions of Army Engineer service. It will also look at some of the methods being utilized today to provide a forum for participation in engineer and engineer related activities. And lastly, as a whole, it will pay tribute to all those who have given so much, for so many, in helping to make the Army Corps of Engineers what it has become.

## Engineer Family

One need not be an actual veteran themselves to participate in activities like these. There are many siblings of veterans who are heavily involved, and in fact many of these people have carried on the legacies of their involved parent or grandparent long after their passing. One result of this is that an "extended family of Army Engineers" now exists in numerous forms throughout the country.

As the number of World War Two surviving veterans declines daily, a growing number of their family members are stepping forward to assure that memories of past missions accomplished by engineers during the war are never forgotten. To look deeper into the motives behind these admirable actions, consider the experiences of two daughters of World War Two combat engineers, the first living in New Jersey and the second in Michigan.

**Mari Ippolito** is the daughter of a World War Two veteran with the 297th Engineer Combat Battalion. In her own words...

### Taking care of "our boys"

Army Engineer Reunion! That's what the invite said all those years ago when my dad showed it to me. Having heard the stories all my life, and having known many of his

fellow engineers, including Gasper "Perry" Pericone who received a Bronze Star for saving his life, I asked immediately "Can I go?" Dad was surprised, and more than a little thrilled when I signed up to join him and Mom for the 3-day reunion in the Catskills. At that reunion, I was one of three "kids" to attend. Now, almost 15 years later, there's a "kid" or "grand-kid" for almost every one of "our boys" as we call them. They're in their mid 80s now, but as feisty as ever.

I became very involved with the battalion after that first reunion. My senior thesis was on the 297th "museum" that was co-located with a restaurant in Kentucky, owned by Hal Miller, another veteran who served with Dad. I archived as many photos as I could find, and had them scanned onto CDs for storage. It was



A 297th Combat Engineers' poster designed by Mari Ippolito referencing a museum which held numerous artifacts and memorabilia provided by veterans of the WWII 297th Combat Engineers. The museum was co-located with a restaurant in Owensboro, Kentucky, and was destroyed by fire last year. Vowing never to give up, the owner is rebuilding the facility. (Photo courtesy Mari Ippolito)



Mari Ippolito's favorite photograph of her dad Tony (far right) and his 297th Combat Engineer Battalion buddies acting "like boys" during World War Two. (Photo courtesy Mari Ippolito)

through that project I became involved with sending the vintage photos to *Army Engineer Magazine*. To my delight, the 297th was featured in an outstanding photo essay. I am in contact with the members of the reunion group regularly. We even exchange holiday cards. The 297th is "my family". Can I give examples of how and why without seeming sappy? No, I can't.

My first example is when Hal Miller's restaurant burned down last year, taking with it his huge 297th memorabilia collection. I got three calls about it within an hour. Dad choked up when I told him, but he said "Hal's tough, he'll re-open." Hal's daughter Evelyn and I exchanged emails weekly, keeping up on the progress, and re-open he will.

My 297th "sister" Adele DePolo, arranged many of the battalion reunions with Hal, Joe Rufo and Cy Cinnamon. Her dad, Tabor (who wrote the unit history book that all the men cherish and jokingly call "the sacred book" —my dad carried it on his lap when he moved so the movers wouldn't lose it), passed on years ago, but she and her late

mom, Mary, have always been very active with the battalion reunions. Adele and I call each other 'sis'—we are siblings through the love and camaraderie our fathers developed 60-plus years ago.

A final example is this: One of the members, Joe Rufo, lost his wife Mary a few years ago. At the funeral home I met with no less than five Army Engineers, one of whom (Joe Ferrara) took several busses and a subway from Queens to Yonkers just to be there. Joe Ferrara, who is one of Dad's best buddies, suffered a stroke this winter. I spoke to his wife every week while he was in rehab. He called for Dad a day after arriving home. I was so happy to hear his voice I cried. Joey Ferrara never misses a reunion, but he won't be able to attend this year. They'll call him from the dinner, though, so he can feel like he's there. That's what they did for Dad when he was recovering from heart surgery and couldn't get to a past reunion in Owensboro, KY. Being called and included made him smile for the first time that week.

People ask me all the time why I go to the reunions, and why I design t-shirts and hats for the attendees. Why do I want to spend my vacation days with a group of senior citizens? The answer is simple. Because I love it. And I love them...veterans from the "greatest generation". Those men, and their families, are my "family" too. They are an extension of my father.

When I'm with them, I see the "boys" they were, and the "men" they became. The ones who made it possible for my generation to grow up in freedom and peace. Who taught me to love and respect my country, and those who serve it.

No history book in the world can replace a live story, told by a veteran who speaks not only of the horrors of war, but also of "liberating a chicken coop full of eggs" so he can feed his guys something fresh after months of C-rations. The added "and besides, it's not really stealing 'cause they were Nazi chickens anyway..." said with twinkling eyes, not only illustrates the emotion, but the logic of a 20-year-old.

I've attended several reunions in the Catskills, and some fabulous ones in Washington D.C. In 2005, we toured the White House. A group of 8th graders asked me "Hey, lady, what's the 297th Engineers and who are all those old guys?" indicating our matching t-shirts. "They're World War Two veterans, here for a reunion." I explained. At the





LEFT: Mari Ippolito, front left, joins other "unit siblings" of the 297th Engineers at a reunion gathering. Battalion veteran Joe Rufo is shown at the back left. BOTTOM: 297th veterans, spouses, and siblings share time together at the battalion's 2005 reunion dinner. Mari is second from the right. (Photos courtesy Mari Ippolito)



blank stares, I went further. "Ever see Saving Private Ryan?" They nodded. "These men were there." With that, I got through. "Cool! You guys are heroes!" one boy said. Another told them he was proud to meet them and that he was going to rent the movie again now that he did.

There's another reason why I attend battalion reunions. To keep the history and traditions of the 297th alive...for myself...for my father...for his friends...for the future.

I offer to personally host a reunion in New York every year, and look forward to being able to do so someday. Our attendance list is expanding. My goddaughter has attended several reunions and as a history teacher, is able to pass on the 297th stories to her students. In 2001, she and another young woman who are like daughters to me, attended with us. Dad was so proud to have his surrogate granddaughters there! Hallie, Hal's granddaughter, has attended since she was a baby. She makes every vet a gift, sings at the dinner and buzzes around helping like a bee. This beautiful young lady is our unofficial 'mascot' and everyone looks forward to seeing her.

Our reunions always take place D-Day week in June. We have a memorial for those who have passed recently and for those who didn't make it home. We have planned activities and a wonderful dinner party. This year, we are going to Philadelphia. I am bringing the issue of *Army Engineer Magazine* which featured the photo spread on the 297th to have the boys sign it. It will be hung in my office next to the WWII "We clear the way" Engineer poster

that holds 25 of their autographs. My living room features a collage of WWII photos of Dad and the 297th. My favorite shot features him pouring a bucket of water over another man's head while their friends look on. It shows a glimpse of the kids beneath the soldiers, and a moment of fun captured among years of chaos.

I also attend reunions because I owe it to "the boys". The ones who came back, and the ones who didn't. I attend because I enjoy their company, and I get to watch the years melt away when they are together. I am thrilled with their achievements and I cry for their sorrows. But that's what families do, isn't it?

I am proud to be a part of the 297th Combat Engineer family. They stand by and stand up for each other, even after all these years. I am a better person for having known them.

**L**ike Mari Ippolito, **Marion Chard** from Michigan is also the daughter of an engineer veteran of the Second World War. Not only does she maintain close ties with members of the VI Corps Engineers with whom she is involved, but she has designed and maintains

an impressive website, and is writing a book to document the wartime accomplishments of those who served in the unit. Now...in her own words.

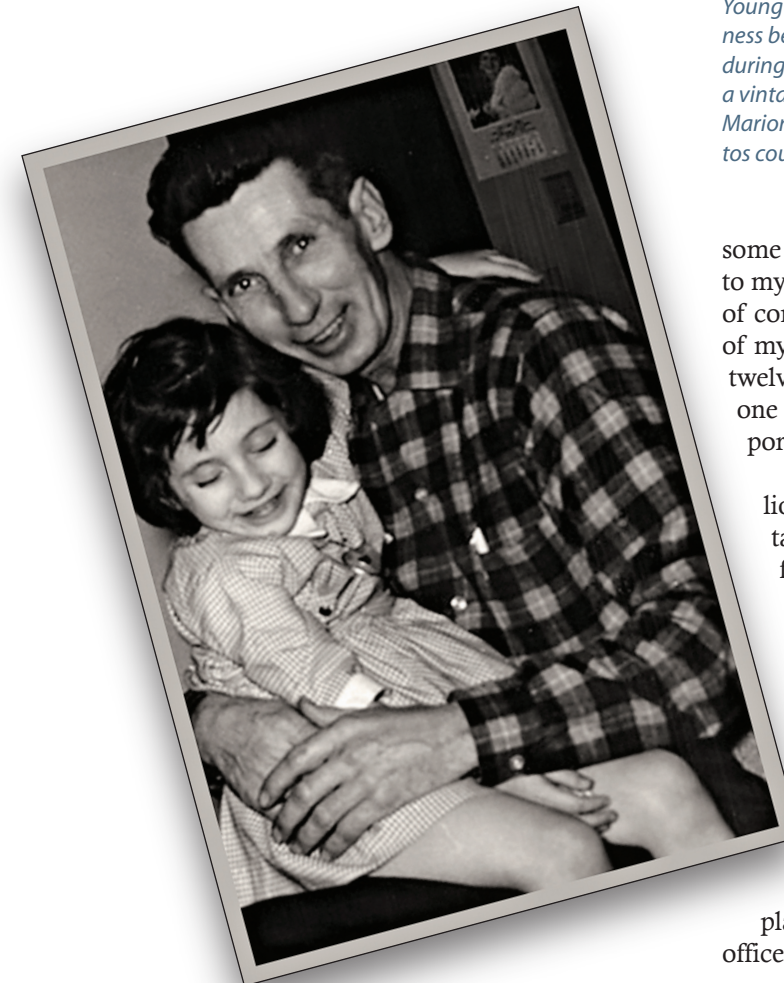
### A Box of Chocolates

Most of you will be familiar with the popular quote from the movie *Forrest Gump*, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." Well it also rang true for me.

I don't remember the first time that well-worn sepia-toned box with the raised gold filigree and the words, "Bunte - Chicago - Mi Choice Chocolates", appeared in my life, but it seems it was always a part of my world. The objects within held a strange and constant fascination for a young girl trying desperately to hold on to the fleeting war memories relayed by her dad to his loving family and friends. The rectangular box was never far from my side, and was kept in a nightstand, as I moved from house to house and city to city. Every now and then I would sit on the floor, carefully remove the tattered lid and lovingly lay each item before me. Maybe I was hoping a name would mysteriously appear on the back of a photo, giving me



Young Marion on her father (Walter's) knee, demonstrates the closeness between the two. T/5 Walter Poniedzialek, above, taken early during the war. It was his collection of service memorabilia kept in a vintage candy box that planted the seed of interest which drew Marion closer to the veterans with whom her father had served. (Photos courtesy Marion Chard)



some clue as to who these young men were who stood next to my father, smiling back at me. Maybe it was a source of comfort and a way for me to try and hold on to a part of my life when my father passed away when I was only twelve. Maybe it was all those things and more. But the one thing I did not know and could not know was the important role that fraying box would play later in my life.

The cherished items included things that a million other GIs brought back from their tours of duty; tattered and faded black and white photos of foxhole friends, patches and pins that were proudly worn on Ike jackets, and currency from faraway countries that I could only begin to dream about. But now there was no longer anyone to tell the story of their experiences, but only a daughter's fading memories of tales told around the dining room table in Detroit.

Hard as I tried, I could only recall brief details from the stories that held me spellbound as a young child, but I do remember a certain sense of awe, fascination and trepidation as the German Luger came out from its secret hiding place, followed by the sound of steel as the German officer's sword was deftly removed from its scabbard. Slice!





VI Corps Engineer veterans Mike Cassic (left) and John Fallon share a moment with Marion Chard at a past reunion. (Photo courtesy Marion Chard)

The fascination never left and was renewed each time this scene was repeated in our house by my dad. I sat wide-eyed and in perfect silence, as I eagerly awaited another tale from across the sea. I never forgot that bullets could do a lot of damage and make holes in men, THIS BIG! I never forgot the word ANZIO and talk about beachheads and sand and a hail of artillery. I will never forget the mood in the room and the impression it made on me. Never!

Even though my dad and I only had twelve years together, those years left an indelible impression on that innocent girl. We were close. “I was daddy’s girl!” My father and I did a lot of things together and that included watching war movies and the TV show, Combat! My mother did not share our enthusiasm and frankly I think she thought we were both a bit nuts, for we would sit riveted on our sofa as the black and white images flowed across the screen. I will never forget that faraway stare that came across his face. He was instantly transformed and transported a few thousand miles away. His body would involuntarily jerk and maybe a foot would stomp or an arm would twitch, but he was no longer in the room with me. I never questioned him, but always wondered where he was and what he was thinking. I had no way to comprehend all the emotions that must have been running through his veins, but even at that age I began to understand, appreci-

ate and respect all that he had been through.

It always took me back to that box and left me wanting to know more. I could no longer remember what Army unit he was with, or what many of the cherished souvenirs represented. It always left me with a longing and a wish that we had written things down. But how could I berate myself for I was only an elementary school child, and when you are that young you think your parents will live forever.

One winter day at my mother’s house, I sifted through Christmas cards that adorned her room, and ran across a name I was not familiar with. Mom, I exclaimed, who is Ira Wheatley? Oh, that’s an old Army buddy of your dads. Well that’s all I needed to hear, and a few weeks later my husband and I arranged to meet at Ira’s house. Most people would not understand my excitement, but my husband did, for he shared my interest in World War II history, and was delighted to accompany me on this visit.

What an interesting man Ira Wheatley was and what a fascinating life he had. He graciously filled us in on my dad’s Army unit’s tour of duty in the ETO, the European Theatre of Operations, and many times the conversation would return to Anzio. Dreaded Anzio! I began to see the same reaction in other men anytime that word was mentioned. It must have been hell. It was. Ira spoke of the

Vetrans assemble as a group at a recent reunion. Shown are: Top row: Mike Cassic, John Zappitello, John Ivancik, John Fallon, Harold Bare, Art Cook Bottom row: Paul Blackburn, Charlie Kassebohm, Vito Cupertino, Tony Stefanelli, Carl Furtado, Bob Felker. (Photo courtesy Marion Chard)



intense and constant shelling that forced the men to bury their trucks in the sand, in order to keep the machine shops running. It brought back a flood of memories from my childhood. “I know these stories”, I said to myself.

After a grand day together, I hugged Ira and told him what a thrill it was to meet him. I could kick myself later on because even though we continued to exchange Christmas cards for years, we never again met in person, and many of things that he imparted to me on that day were forever lost because of my failure to put pen to paper. When he passed on in the 1990’s, my only connection was severed, and I was almost back to square one in my quest to learn more about my dad’s wartime experiences.

While still living in Detroit, I contacted the National Archives in St. Louis, but it took three successive tries before I finally received a letter at our new home in northern Michigan in autumn 2003. Sorry, they informed me, but your father’s records burned in a huge fire in 1973. How could it end this way? I was so distraught it took me almost three weeks before I could show the letter from St. Louis to my husband. I then began to feel angry and that anger led me to one conclusion; I would not give up and this would not defeat me. I had the Internet didn’t I?

So as the winter months bore down on our little town, I put forth an undying effort in front of my personal computer. I re-opened the box of my dad’s wartime mementos for the umpteenth time and fed anything and everything into the Google search engine. The first few weeks were frustrating as I tried to figure out where to begin. How does one go about looking for a military unit when you don’t

even know what unit a person was with? How do you write a description for a unit designation shoulder patch? The quest was daunting considering how many Army units had fought in the ETO. I began narrowing it down with the 5th and 7th Army patches, but found it was a lot of ground to cover. My job was made all the more difficult because he had one shoulder patch with a Seahorse on it and another with a Red Bull. HELP!

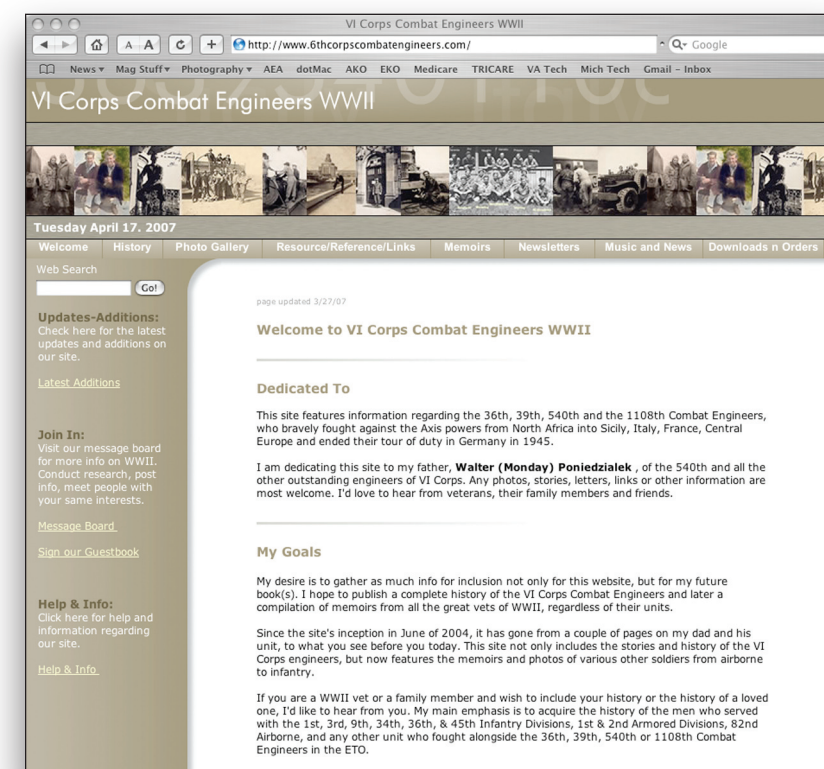
With bound determination, I began to feel as though I was making progress. I found a site for the 34th Infantry Division, the great Red Bulls, but conflicting info from other sites sent my head into a tizzy. The Seahorse patch belonged to the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment, but the 36th Engineers were NOT part of their organization. I sent a letter to the 34th, and then found the name of a John Fallon, 36th Combat Engineer Regiment. I began to scratch out diagrams on paper trying to come up with a divisional chart. Still, something wasn’t adding up.

A few weeks later I received a letter from Jerry Gorden, webmaster of the 34th Infantry, along with a unit history. In the interim I found another reference to “Seahorses” and the name of Rene Rousselle, a 540th Combat Engineer, and the contact for their unit. I sent a letter in late April 2004, along with photographic scans of the pins and patches I had in my wartime collection. Oh dear, I was coming up with answers, but at this juncture I wasn’t sure which direction it was leading me.

I received a hand-written letter from Rene Rousselle the first week of May. I was overjoyed. Rene informed me that my dad was assigned to the 540th Combat Engineer Regiment. John Fallon’s email followed a few days later, and told of the 36th Combat Engineer’s proud history, and invited me to call him. I will never forget the day we first spoke, for it was the 60th Anniversary of the Normandy D-Day landings.

I’ve had the honor and privilege of meeting hundreds of WWII veterans and their families, and through their encouragement, moral support, friendship and love, have taken on the task of writing a book. I’ve also been able to create a website dedicated to my father and the VI Corps engineers (the 36th, 39th, 540th and the 1108th). [www.6thcorpscombatengineers.com](http://www.6thcorpscombatengineers.com) (portion shown left)

Marion Chard designed and maintains an impressive website (see link above) which is dedicated to her father and other VI Corps Engineers who served during the Second World War. The site is complete with links to articles, photos, era music and other related information of interest to veterans and friends.





So through dogged determination (I inherited my dad's engineer genes!), the kindness of countless individuals and a now unquestioning belief in divine intervention, I find myself at an unbelievable juncture. And that takes us back to that tiny box that once held an array of unanswered questions; life is like that box of chocolates, you never do know what you're going to get!

## Veterans step forward

In addition to the efforts of **Mari Ippolito** and **Marion Chard** discussed above, there are numerous other individuals who share a common purpose in helping to promote and preserve the history and traditions of Army Engineering.

Central to those efforts are dedicated veterans of Army Engineer service themselves, who for various reasons feel motivated to help organize others. Most form veteran unit reunion groups which are key to retention of organizational cohesiveness as time moves on. In all cases, the formation of such entities was a result of volunteer work on the part of a few individuals, or in many cases a single individual.

**Gene Kuentzler** is one such person. He is a 1966-67 veteran of the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion with service in South Vietnam at Bong Son and Tam Quan. Gene is representative of hundreds of others who have worked, and continue to work, to sustain the close bonds of engineer service. And now, how Gene Kuentzler and others "made it happen" (in his own words)

I'd like to share how our 19th Combat Engineer Battalion Vietnam Association was formed, to encourage others who have not yet found their long-lost buddies how to organize their own unit alumni. It only takes one member to get things started, but as others get involved they'll step up to take the various positions needed to keep things rolling along.



Before the internet was widely available, around 1980, I started trying to locate two 19th Engineer guys I served with in Vietnam: Master Sergeant Chuck Kisling, and Sp/4 Dick Yost. Every time our family took an out-of-town trip I'd check the phone book for their names. In 1991 at a veterans event in Indiana, four others who served in the 19th accidentally and separately ran into one another.

Wearing a t-shirt with 19th Engineers printed on the front by my daughter, I came across Jack Sawvel, B/19th (68-69), Marty Walker, A/19th (68-69), Bob Knutsen, Hq/19th (68-69) and Tom Ebrite, Hq/19th (67-68). Since we had gone to Vietnam and returned as individuals rather than as a complete unit, we discovered that many of us had carried similar feelings about our separate service, quietly to ourselves. Although we never talked about that service for many years, each of us had a lost buddy or two they wanted to find. We discussed ways to locate others and ideas on how to form a veteran association. To be frank, it was tough trying to locate members before the internet, but as that capability evolved, we had more tools to work with in searching for others.

Tom Ebrite began posting reunion notices in veteran magazines, other association members wrote to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), requesting unit rosters from their service time period and company of assignment. This effort provided us the names of many others to contact. The NPRC is also the place to request a complete individual 201 file (service record).



LEFT: Veterans of the 19th Engineers assemble during a recent reunion. TOP: An important aspect of reunions conducted by the 19th is the involvement of family members in many of the activities. (Photos courtesy of Gener Kuentzler)



LEFT: Two Soldiers from the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion searching for Viet Cong booby traps in South Vietnam. BOTTOM: Veterans of the 19th raise the colors at one of their annual reunions conducted in Waynesville, Missouri near Fort Leonard Wood. (Photos courtesy of Gene Kuentzler and the 19th Association's website)



Over the next few months, letters began pouring in with more and more names and addresses of 19th veterans and it was obvious that I was going to be volunteered by the others to be the "hub" for organizing everyone. By going through a long-ago packed away box of memento's, I discovered I had some unit information and many items which I felt would be of interest to share, so I decided to start a newsletter.

An old typewriter served to put together the first edition. It included a copy of our unit history, and articles from original 1967 issues of "Colt 45 News", "Castle Courier", "Kysu" magazine, and our "Seahorse News". We also listed all the attached units to the 19th (including them in our group), and the final page was a relatively small roster with names and addresses of those found at that point in time. By the end of our first year we'd located 51 alumni. And, as a great personal reward for me, I eventually found the two guys I was initially searching for—Chuck Kisling and Dick Yost.

Our first reunion was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri where many of us received our initial entry engineer training prior to going to Vietnam. During that reunion we voted two-year terms for President, Vice President, Secre-

tary, Treasurer, and Historian. We also created by-laws and a mission statement.

Our mission statement reads as follows: The 19th Combat Engineer Battalion, Association Vietnam is organized by past members of the battalion who served together in Vietnam. Our purpose is to (1) locate and bring together past members of the 19th, or those who were members of an attached unit, while that unit was attached to the 19th; (2) preserve and foster the spirit of fellowship among former members and provide an organization through which they may unite in bonds of comradeship; and (3) to commemorate the memory of 19th Engineer Battalion soldiers who gave their lives in service of our country.

To help spread the word about our association activities, we restored for our membership, the publication of the original unit's newsletter, the "Seahorse News", as a quarterly issue.

Although many in our group remember one another from their time together in Vietnam, we have had instances of a few "wannabe" 19th veterans attempted to claim they served in or with the battalion. In order to screen applicants, we require each prospective member provide our Membership Committee with verification of service such





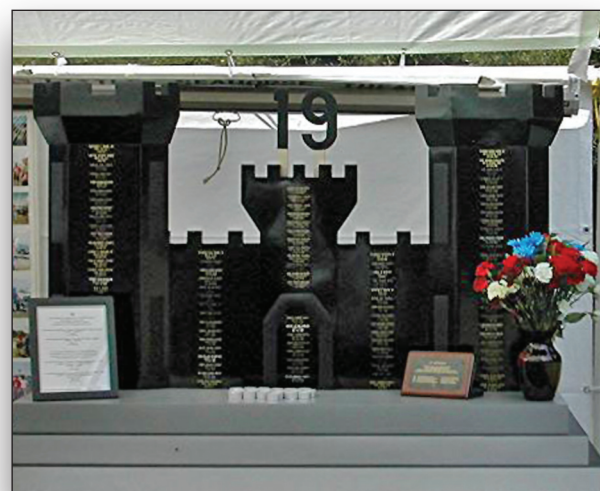
## THE CASTLE

Strength, pride, heraldry, prestige, and honor. The castle remains the premier symbol of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The medieval castle is inseparably connected with fortifications and architecture. In heraldry, the castle and the tower are often used on coats of arms. In this country the term “castle” has been applied to the strongest of our early fortifications such as Castle Pickney in Charleston, South Carolina, and Castles Williams and Clinton in New York Harbor.

The Corps Castle is a highly stylized form without decoration or embellishment. The Army unofficially adopted the castle to appear on the Corps of Engineers’ epaulets and belt plate in 1840. Soon afterwards the cadets at West Point, all of whom were part of the Corps of Engineers until the Military Academy left the charge of the Chief of Engineers and came under the charge of the Army at large in 1866, also wore the castle on their cap beginning in 1841.

Subsequently, the castle appeared on the shoulder knot, on the saddlecloth, as a collar device, and on the buttons. Finally, in 1902, the castle was formally adopted by the Army as the insignia of the Corps of Engineers. Although its design has changed many times since its inception, the castle has remained the distinctive symbol of the Corps of Engineers.

*From USACE Office of History Historical Vignette Number 90*



**“On the last night (of our reunion) we read the names of our fallen brothers, which are posted on our Memorial Castle. After the names are read, we ring a brass bell 19 times.”**

as a DD-214 Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty and (perhaps) orders of assignment/ attachment to the 19th Engineers. I suppose the above may sound a bit harsh, but we truly value our time in service together with the 19th and wish to limit our activities accordingly.

Today we have over 350 members in the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion Vietnam Association. Over 150 members are in touch “on-line”, and to keep interest alive throughout the year we have a quarterly newsletter, for which members donate funds to cover the cost of printing and mailing. We also have our own website: <http://home.earthlink.net/~engr19/>

We routinely conduct our annual reunion in September, always being held at the Roubidoux Spring Campground in Waynesville, Missouri near Fort Leonard Wood. Some attendees camp in motor homes, while others stay at local motels. Some have never missed a reunion in 16 years!

These are “family oriented” events and members bring their wives, children and grandchildren, arriving from New York to California. Members bring their service memorabilia items, and we have tables set aside for photo albums. Many bring “Seahorse items” and donate them for a raffle. Every year the kids look forward to being involved with passing out raffle tickets, drawing the winning numbers and presenting the items.

We conduct a formal business meeting and also present a “slide show”, with some memories being seen for the first time in 40 years. On the last night we read the names of our fallen brothers, which are posted on our Memorial Castle. After the names are read, we ring a brass bell 19 times. The bell is from a San Francisco Cable Car, donated by Jose Diaz, who served in A company (68-69).

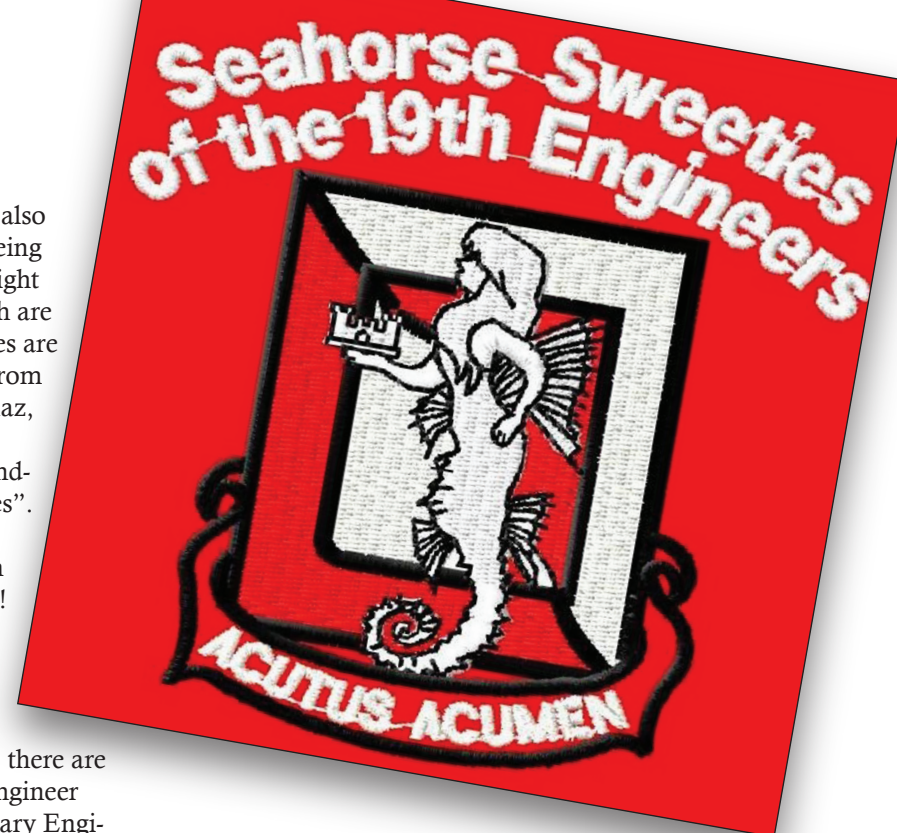
Also, our wives have created their own “bonding” and call themselves the “Seahorse Sweeties”. We’ve provided them with their own monogrammed shirts “Seahorse Sweeties of the 19th Engineers”. We couldn’t do it all without them!

## Organizations in support

Besides groups such as those just discussed, there are much larger organizations such as the Army Engineer Association and the Society of American Military Engineers which offer their respective members various forums during which they may engage in activities fostering common bonds of engineer and military service in general. At the national level, these organizations offer programs and services focused directly or indirectly on Army Engineering, but it is at the local level where “the rubber meets the road”.

For example, the Meigs Chapter of the Army Engineer Association (AEA) located in Washington DC, has for years met on a regular schedule, normally in a monthly luncheon format, with invited guest speakers of special interest. Since the chapter is located in the Washington DC metropolitan region, it is attractive to both active and retired personnel associated with the Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The current Chapter President, **Colonel (Retired) Ed Gibson**, followed his distinguished military career with an equally distinguished period of service as a Department of the Army Civilian on the USACE staff. Now long retired from active federal service, he joins others who earlier served in the position of Chapter President, as people who truly made a difference. The Meigs Chapter is by far the most successful AEA chapter with a relatively large annual membership. However, there are other AEA chapters located elsewhere throughout the United States, Germany and Korea, which have been successful from time to time in their own right.

Prior to the creation of the AEA in 1991, the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) was the only major organization engaged in activities which helped bring together Army Engineers at local levels. Oriented on military engineering as a whole, SAME has always focused on the past and current day activities and accomplishments from not only within the U.S. Army, but from all other military services and industry as well.



*Family members with the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion Vietnam Association designed their own special logo, which is sewn on t-shirts. (Photo courtesy Gene Kuentzler)*

Today, SAME and AEA work side-by-side, each in their own way, to help foster an appreciation of Army Engineering, and its contributions to the defense of the United States and its allies.

## Few things are better

In life, few things are better than the rewards of being united with friends and family. The latter need not just be the traditional family of parents, grandparents and children, but may include a “family” composed of people with whom successes and failures were shared. Hunkered down together in a foxhole while being bombarded by an determined enemy; laboring together to design and build a bridge, an airfield, or some other military oriented structure; laughing and joking together during times of relaxation; and, crying together during difficult times, such as with the loss of comrades.

As a result of being a part of such “families”, all involved have their lives improved in ways too numerous to list. It’s been said that “man” is a social animal. The most famous of all notions describes men and women as such. That is to say, it is a part of “man’s” nature to form groups and communities wherever he lives, and that man cannot live without such structure.

As we have just explored in this article, this notion is most applicable to the inseparable bonds of engineer service, and the various manners in which those bonds are being strengthened daily by thousands of people, all over the world. **AE**