

HISTORY SKETCH 157th ENGINEER (C) BN.

The 157th Engineer (c) Bn. was activated at Camp Maxey, Texas in April, 1943. At the time of activation, the unit was commanded by Captain Fellheimer; with Captain K. C. Stainbrook as Executive Officer; Captain Garrett as S-3, 1st Lt. Heller as S-1; Companies were commanded by the following: Company A, 1st Lt. J. K. Polk; Company B, 2nd Lt. R. Anderson; Company C (Unknown); Headquarters & Service, 1st Lt. Heller (in addition to duties as S-1).

The officer personnel of the unit was increased throughout April and May until a good percentage of the authorized complement was present.

Major R. N. Blancett assumed command of the organization April or early May, 1943.

By the time troops had arrived (in May, 1943), the officers and enlisted cadre (from 35th (?) Engineers, Hawaiian Dept.) were organized in what was to become their permanent assignments. Companies were commanded by the following officers at the time training started: Company A, J. K. Polk, 1st Lt.; Company B, H. C. Davis, 1st Lt.; Company C, H. A. Benton, 2nd Lt.; Headquarters & Service, Heller, 1st Lt. (also Adjutant). The S-3 was Captain Garrett; The S-4 was Captain Fellheimer (formerly the Commanding Officer); The S-2 was Captain Ray; The Executive Officer was K. C. Stainbrook, and the Commanding Officer was R. N. Blancett, Major.

The unit received filler personnel totaling approximately 750 men, the bulk of which were recent inductees with no training. A 13-week training cycle was launched and was

carried through with the normal difficulties experienced by a unit of this nature which is under strength in cadre and officer personnel.

The average age of the unit, including officer personnel was in the neighborhood of 21 years. This youth was later to prove a definite asset to extended fatiguing work.

The unit completed its training while still at Camp Maxey, Texas early in September and moved to the Louisiana-East Texas maneuver area by motor convoy on or about 15 September, 1943.

The mission of the unit in the maneuver area for the first few weeks was the repair of roads and bridges in the area. Acting as a neutral organization, much training was received in reconnaissance for engineer information, repair of roads and bridges and the construction of new bridges. The unit received some pontoon (heavy) Bridge training under one of the maneuvering Pontoon Companies. Later the unit participated in a problem in the maneuver attached to the 102nd Division. During the problem, the Bn. concentrated on barrier tactics, laying mine fields and preparing obstacles. At one time, the unit was used on a dual mission of protecting the northern flank and preparing obstacles. At another time, the unit was used as Infantry to assist in holding an attacking force.

The unit received much valuable training on the maneuver, more in the sense of general experience than in consideration of any one subject.

During the maneuver, the unit was commanded by Major K. C. Stainbrook, who had relieved L. Col. R.N. Blancett just prior to the departure of the unit from Camp Maxey.

While on maneuvers, a complement of officers was sent to Fort Belvoir to form a cadre for another unit. The Bn. was then reorganized as follows: Commanding, K. C. Stainbrook, Major; Executive Officer, W. Hogue, Major; S-3, H. C. Davis, Captain; S-1, C. O. Harris, 1st Lt.; S-4, H. A. Benton, 1st Lt.; Company A, J. K. Polk, Captain; Company B, R. Anderson, 1st Lt.; Company C, B. W. Snippen, Captain; Headquarters & Service, V. H. Dowdy, Captain.

In November, 1943, the unit returned to Camp Maxey, Texas and immediately began to prepare for overseas movement. From November, 1943 to February, 1944, the unit trained night and day in order to complete the required POM subjects in the amount of time allotted. Much valuable night training was received during this period.

In February, 1944, the unit moved to a New York POE (Camp Shanks) and after processing, to the ship that was to take it to England. The unit left the United States 27 February, 1944.

On or about 10 March, 1944, the unit arrived in England at a small port near Bristol, and was moved by train to a tent camp near Tiddeworth, north of **S**aulsberry. Remaining there but a short time, it moved by motor convoy in a black-out move to Chipping Norton, just north of Oxford.

The unit remained at Chipping Norton under control of the 1109th Engineer (C) Group, commanded by Colonel Sorley, training in road repair and in fixed and floating bridges. A general review in mine warfare and other training was carried on.

In June, 1944, the unit moved to South Hampton and embark-

ed for France. The ships set aside for the unit were being loaded by other units and it was through the efforts of the Bn. Commander only that the unit was finally loaded. Once loaded, the unit remained on board ship for seven days before debarking in France (Utah Beach) on the 21st of June, 1944.

Once in France, the unit moved directly to Volognes with the mission of opening routes through the city and maintaining other routes in the area.

The roads of Northern France were bituminous and required constant maintenance to withstand the heavy army traffic. The unit had received no training in the repair of bituminous roads and much experimenting was carried on. German and French tar mixed with beach sand was used most extensively, although it was found that the best "mix" was RC 3 road tar and beach sand mixed at the ratio approximately 1 to 12 by volume while both the sand and tar were heated.

From Volognes, the unit (attached to the 1109th Group as it was throughout the war in Europe) under the First Army, moved to St. Saveur le Vicomte with the same mission as previously assigned in Volognes. From St. Saveur, the unit moved through LeHuy de Puits to Issigne and thence to an assembly area just north of St. Lo.

With the breakthrough at St. Lo, the unit moved by night over roads jammed with traffic, southward, moving all night and bivouacing at day. During this move, it was learned the unit was assigned to the Third Army, attached to the XV Corps. After a series of moves, night and day with little time for rest and the servicing of vehicles, the unit arrived at Le Mans

and without pause followed the 79th Division northward toward Alencon. The only engineer work done so far in this move was the installation of a Bailey Bridge over a blown span of a multiple arch bridge. The bridge withstood traffic all night and collapsed the following day with no vehicle on it. Reason: No provision had been made for horizontal forces and the dead weight of the bridge caused it to collapse. A lesson was learned here that was never forgotten; an arch bridge (keystone), once the series of arches are broken, must be braced against itself to prevent its collapsing from its own weight on a horizontal movement.

Never quite reaching Alencon, the unit turned eastward and with the 79th Division reached the Seine River at Mantes Gassicourt. The 79th Division made a bridgehead at Rosecrans and the river was bridged by the 163rd Engineer (c) Bn., of the 1109th Group, with an M-2 treadway. The bridge was under constant aerial attack but was never knocked out. The 157th Engineers were charged with building a bridge across the Seine at Mantes Gassicourt that would relieve the bottleneck. The 79th Division was charged with enlarging the bridgehead east of the Seine around Lemay to a thousand yards to permit the construction of the bridge. This could not be done in the time allotted but work on the bridge started on schedule without the expected observed artillery fire.

The bridge to be built was suggested and designed by Lt. Col. K. C. Stainbrook and work started immediately (see pictures). The bridge was first built as a 1-way class 40 Bailey mounted on the Seine river barges found in the vicinity. The barges were

floated into position after night under fire from both friendly and enemy small arms. The necessary steel hangers were welded into place and the bridge launched. Since this was a new use for the Bailey Bridge, many trial and error methods were used. In spite of this, the bridge was positioned in a minimum amount of hours and then, once in place, converted to a Class 70 by the addition of more panels and transoms. A second bridge was completed on the same barges permitting unobstructed two-way traffic. During the construction of the bridges, the site was under constant aerial attack with negligible results. It is reported that the AA Artillery alone brought down over 200 enemy planes in a 3-day period at this site. In addition, a number of enemy planes flying low were brought down by the organic weapons of the Bn. and surrounding units. This bridge site was turned over to the British and the unit moved with the XV Corps southwestward around Paris to the vicinity of Troyes. (See chart attached.)

After a short recuperation period south of Paris, the unit moved on with the XV Corps on the southern flank of the Third Army. When contact was made with the Seventh Army, the XV Corps and attached units were placed under the Seventh Army.

Work in this sector, while moving toward the Moselle River at Charmes, was generally bridge construction and road repairs.

At Charmes, the 163rd Engineers had installed a treadway bridge (M-2) with the aid of equipment from the 157th

Engineers and units were crossing the Moselle.

The unit moved northward and crossed the Moselle River at Bayon, moving on to the vicinity of Luneville. Company C had meanwhile been designated to establish a bridge dump west of Charmes and later moved the dump near Luneville. At Luneville, the Bn., with one company of the 163rd attached was charged with building a bridge across the river (Meurthe), the maintenance of approximately 40 miles of road (Charmes to Bayon, on east bank of Moselle), Bayon to Luneville and the connecting roads in the area, the building of a bridge at Lamathe on the MSR without interrupting traffic, and numerous other engineer tasks.

At Luneville, a treadway (M-2) bridge was first installed and as possible, lumber was gathered from any and everywhere to build a fixed bridge. This bridge was unique in that the lumber obtained came from a lumber yard under mortar fire, and that some of the stringers were steel I beams removed from a factory building nearby, carefully, so as not to weaken, too much, the structure of the building. No one span was similar to the next, but a 190 foot 2-way class 40 bridge was soon in place.

The 79th Division was held up in the Foret De Parroy and in general, the entire front had bogged down in mud faced by a determined enemy. (For dates, see attached chart.)

The mud in and around Luneville was the worse enemy. Bridges at Charmes were washed out and Company A put in another treadway, starting work immediately on additional bridges which were again washed out. At Bayon, Company B

put in a treadway to supplement the fixed bridge there which was in danger. Roads in the area were covered with slush; bivouac areas were mud bogs, hospitals were crying for engineers to build access roads. In general, there was more engineer work to be done than there were engineers. French civilians were hired but proved too slow. A squad of the unit (15 men) could do more than 100 Frenchmen in one day.

Bridges east of Luneville were under water. New ones were required at Marionviller and at Manoville. At Marionviller, Company A built a bridge using existing (damaged) pile bents. At Manoville, Company B built a 2-way class 40 bridge on a floating crib sunk in the middle of the stream with large stones. The bridge at Manoville though subject to enemy artillery fire was not fired on until completed.

Roads in the area just east of Luneville were gravel and, with the rains, had become almost impassible. Water covered the area and it was decided to use the railroad as an MSR. Rails were rolled back by the bulldozers and the MSR was made.

The unit still had roads to maintain as far back as Charmes and in addition, prepare artillery positions. Artillery men, seeking protection from enemy action and the weather, were daming the ditches and preparing foxholes in the ditches or in the banks at the sides of the road, further complicating road repairs. When the waters started to recede, the roads literally ran with mud.

With the build-up of artillery in the area, the XV Corps jumped off and eventually captured Sarrebourg. The Bn. had the mission, on the move, of clearing the roads of wrecked equipment, building a few bridges and repairing roads. By

this time, the private in the ranks had learned that there was no job, or number of jobs, the Bn. could not complete.

At Sarrebourg, the unit maintained and cleared the roads into the city and on through the Savern Gap. Snow and ice were expected anytime, and all roads had to have sand piles placed on hills and curves. This occupied all dump trucks in the vicinity.

When the town of Sarrebourg was threatened with capture by counterattacking enemy forces, the Bn. was called in to defend the city, along with the 163rd Engineer (c) Bn. Mine fields were laid, and positions prepared around the city. When the fight failed to materialize, the unit moved on northward, stopping eventually at Diemeringen and remained in that vicinity all winter, clearing roads of snow, repairing roads and bridges and preparing positions on the Maginot Line for the 100th Division.

During the Battle of the Bulge, the unit was busily preparing obstacles in the Bitche area; placing mine fields, sometimes using the air compressor to dig the holes for the mines on the frozen soil, and preparing bridges for demolition.

Wire obstacles were placed in 6 to 10 inches of snow and again the Bn. was faced with more work than it could do. In addition to laying mines, the unit was charged with removing enemy mines. It was during this period that a platoon leader in Company C was killed by an enemy mine, and an entire squad of Company C was wiped out when a non-magnetic mine exploded under the wheel of the squad truck. During this period, Company

A was attached to the 106th Cavalry Group and had been acting as both Infantry and Engineers. During an enemy attack, a squad of Company A was captured and a few Company A men wounded.

Eventually, with the Battle of the Bulge over, the XV Corps attacked Bitche. For this operation, the Bn. was attached to the 100th Infantry Division and became Division Engineers, supplementing the regular Division Engineer Bn.

The Bn. preferred working with the 100th Division over working with the 1109th Group in that there was less confusion, in spite of the changing tactical conditions, and much more work could be accomplished without Group intervention. During this period, a platoon of Company B was attached to a Troop of the 121st Cavalry Squadron. The platoon leader, when faced with the necessity of crossing light tanks over a deep ditch under the pressure of an enemy counterattack, constructed a bridge of two I beams and a barn door which proved sufficient and was easily destroyed when its usefulness was over.

It is complementary to the Bn. that the 100th Division requested it be attached to the Division for an indefinite period. However, the Bn. was again attached to the 1109th Engineer (C) Group and started a series of moves behind the Third Division which eventually took it to the Rhine River.

At the Rhine, the Bn. had the mission of supporting the 542nd Engineer Group in crossing near Frankenthal.

Once the crossing was completed, the Bn. moved north and took over the maintenance of roads in the vicinity of Worms and the maintenance of bridges south of Worms. Here

the traffic was so heavy and the road network so poor, the Bn. worked 36 hours without rest in crossing a number of Divisions.

The Commanding Officer had been wounded at the Rhine and the unit was now commanded by Major W. Hogue.

The unit crossed the Rhine at Worms and proceeded eastward to the Main River. Again it was the same old story, repair and rebuild roads and bridges. The Bn. area at times was in excess of 200 square miles.

The units next job of note was providing bridges over the Main River at Bamberg. Company B erected a Bailey Bridge at night and immediately started work on a fixed bridge (pile) to replace the Bailey Bridge. For speed, Company C was crossed to the far bank to work toward Company B and Company A was assigned the project of providing materials and maintaining roads. Working night and day, the bridge was soon in place (approximately 190 foot of pile bridging in approximately 4 days and nights.).

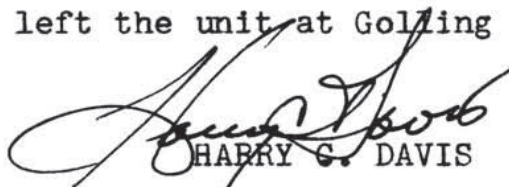
The unit then had as a primary mission, the support of the 42nd Division in the attack on Nurnberg. Once Nurnberg was captured, the unit moved toward Munich, or Munchen as named in Germany. Two companies of the Bn. were kept back in the Corps area to maintain roads and repair bridges and remove mines. Company A, with a unit of Bailey Bridge and a platoon of treadway bridge attached, was made a task force commanded by the Bn. S-3 and attached to the 42nd Division. Just west of Munich, this task force installed a treadway bridge, during the night, providing its own security in front

of the infantry.

Munich soon fell and the Bn. was together again in Munich. The Corps Engineer wanted engineer information of the material available in the city. This information was gathered at night and the unit moved the next day.

The next major job assigned the unit was the bridging of the Salzach River, west of Salzburg, Austria on the autobahn. the unit was engaged in this project on VE Day. After VE Day, the unit completed the project and moved to Golling, Austria, to construct another bridge there. At this time, orders were received to reinforce all bridges toward Italy to Class 40 for a combat team expected to be sent south. The Bn. worked night and day on bridges and roads, even going down into the British area to reinforce bridges. After this job, the unit settled down to easy living, working German PW's and civilians on the restoration of utilities in Salzburg and repairing roads and railroads.

The unit moved to Zipt, Austria and then back to Golling with still the same mission. I left the unit at Golling in August, 1945.



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- NOTE I: The attached pictures and charts are self-explanatory and when fitted together will make a fairly complete history.
- II: A daily report, complete as to projects, losses, etc. was submitted to the 1109th Engineer (C) Group and should be on file with their records.
- III: This information is written from memory and is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.



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