

Marion,

I was on the WWII Combat Engineers website and noted some inquiries about the 257th Engineer Combat Battalion. My grandfather was in the 257th and sent a letter to my grandmother dated 6/5/45. I do not believe that he wrote it based upon the writing style but I believe someone in the 257th wrote it and made copies, one of which my grandfather had. The letter chronicles the experiences of the 257th Engineer Combat Battalion from November 1944 to June 1945. I scanned the letter and turned it into a pdf file. I am willing to send it to you for posting on the website but it is 13 MB in size so I figured I'd better ask you before I send it. If you are interested, let me know and I'll send it as an email attachment.

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Marion's note: Posted the letter on the forum in 2010

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JUNE 5, 1945
GERMANY

Heille Darling:-

No mail tonight, honey and in as much as I don't have any mail to answer, I suddenly had a brainstorm. I knew you always wanted to know the names of the towns I passed through, lived in and worked in. So as much as I can possibly remember I will try and put down on paper in this letter.

So here goes:- As far as the records go we landed in a little place called Avenoth, England about the 11th. of November. But actually we were in Bristol, England. From there about 1:00 A.M. on the morning of the 12th. we entrained for Henley-on-Thames, and went by truck to a mud hole called Nettlebed (I don't think you will find that on a map). This Nettlebed was reached about 6:00 A.M., and after our gruelling trip across the Atlantic, and no food for the last 15 hours, the sight of it just about floored us.

It was a tiny camp made up of these cold, damp corrugated iron buildings called "Nissen Huts". For beds we had wooden crates nailed together, and tin strips stretched across the top. For mattresses, burlap sacks full of straw. Never in all my life did I think I could be so down hearted as I was when I saw where we had come across 3500 miles of ocean for. (But there were many times after that, that I would have given a months pay to be back there, and have just the straw to sleep on) or (for that matter just to get some sleep).

Fortunately we didn't stay there but about five days and on the 16th of November moved by foot to a former RAF Camp at Howberry Park, located near Wallingford, England. This place was a very pretty location, and was situated on the Thames river about 35 miles from London, and about 15 miles from Oxford in one direction and Reading in another. All in all we spent a very pleasant six weeks there, under the circumstances, visiting London, Oxford, Reading, and quite a few of the surrounding towns. As I say it wasn't too bad and we had just about decided to sweat out the duration there when on Christmas Eve of all nights we were alerted to move. And in no time at all were on our way to Southampton, England where we boarded LST's for our trip across the English Channel, I have already recounted the miserable Christmas we spent on the water, but unknowingly the worst was yet to come. We landed at Cherbourg, France about 1:00 A.M. on the 26th. of December, and from there went immediately by truck to Barneville Le Plage, Normandy. Here we were attached to the 156th. Infantry Regiment for Coastal Security, helping to contain the 15,000 or so Germans located and isolated on Guernsey and surrounding islands off the coast of Normandy. This was a pleasant life doing nothing more than Road Patrols and so forth, carrying us into such famous battle towns as Le Haye du Puits, ironically having a public square named Place de La General Patton. Other towns nearby that we went into and through were Carteret, St. Lo, Coutances and Caen.

On January 6th., a cold and foreboding day full of threatening snow clouds and sundry other discomforts, we loaded all our belongings on our trucks and took off for a 500 mile trip across France; to our new job and location. This trip gave us our first introduction to the rigors of combat. Each day we could only make about 135 miles due to the icy roads and long convoy. The days were cold and cramped having about 20 or more men to one truck. But the nights were the worst, being dog tired and having no place to sleep but the hard ground covered with a cold mantle of fresh fallen snow. Each morning we had to break our covers away from the ice formed by the melting of the snow under us from the feeble heat of our bodies.

The first night was spent in an apple orchard just outside of the town of Thiancourt, about 200 miles from Paris, and about 150 miles south of St. Lo. The second night in a beat up Chateau high in the mountains just beyond Rambouillet, we were still about 35 miles west of Paris. The next day we went through Versailles, and the outskirts of Paris, catching a glimpse of the famous Eiffel Tower

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it was here on the outskirts of Paris through a ball up in directions we were able to acquire some fresh French bread, and some good French wine. The balance of that days travel was spent in a slightly happy daze. But it soon wore off, especially when we saw what we had to sleep in that night. The name of the town we stopped near was Sommes Sous, about 45 miles south-east of Epernay. And our sleeping facilities were either the cold ground out under the stars, yep you guessed it on more snow, or inside an open garage with a roof overhead but each section a tunnel for the cold icy wind to tear through. The following morning we awakened to some more snow and the prospects of another cold day. We were stiff and sore in every joint and still dog tired having neither acquired rest or sleep through the long night. But we were fairly happy with the thought that today was to be the last leg of our trip.

That night we arrived at our temporary destination, Hermenil, near Luneville, France. It was here that we joined the 7th. Army, being attached to the XV Corps, the 1101st. Engineer Combat Group. But none of this could excite us, we were just too damn cold. None of us hardly tried to sleep that night. About all we did was pull our guard and sit around a fire. But even a fire couldn't keep our feet warm. It felt like they would never get warm again. And it was here that quite a few of our boys contracted Trench Foot, and shortly after ended up in a hospital not to join us for any where from two to four months. The night was finally gotten through somehow, and the following day we pitched squad tents, and received sleeping bags and warm socks and shoe pads, a loose fitting rubber and leather top boot.

We moved from here on the 12th. of January, about 40 miles NE to Morhange. Here we set up a semi-permanent CP. This ride though only lasting about 3 hours was without any tops on the trucks and the fellows just about froze back in the truck. When we arrived it was all they could do to keep from crying at the pain in their feet and faces. But we finally got settled here, and took up our work of road maintenance and Bridge building and repair. While here our work and passes carried us into quite a few famous French towns, most notable among these being Nancy. It was here that we spent our time on pass. In maintaining the Main Supply Routes in our area we had to work in such towns as Dieuze, Saarebourg, Chateau Salins, St. Amand, Falquemont, Bensdorf, Gross Tanquin, and many other smaller towns too numerous and insignificant to mention.

We moved again, this time on the 20th. of February, to a town called Saaralbe, still in France. We continued with the same type of work here, and as yet though we had never been up close to the actual fighting had been bothered occasionally by strafing enemy planes, especially out at the Rock Quarry we operated. As far as I was concerned the only notable thing I remember this place for was that I spent 20 consecutive days in mud up to my knees doing nothing but digging ditches. And I ain't kidding when I say I was digging right along with the men. Boy that was really miserable the same damn thing day in and day out without any time off. When the 15th. of March came along and we learned we had been attached to the 6th. Armored Division for direct Engineer Support, we knew we were at last going to get into the thick of it. But our monotonous work on the road, made us welcome it as a respite from the laborious, nigger like ditch digging, we had been doing for the last two months.

On the 18th. of March, we moved to Sarreinsming, France to await further orders. It was here that we received our first glimpse of Germany. We were patrolling the roads, blowing up mines and removing obstacles, and just keeping busy while waiting for the word to go ahead. Three days later we pulled to the side of the road and watched the 6th. Armored move by on it's way to the breakthrough of the Siegfried Line. And we knew that we were to follow. It was with a tiny tickle in our throat that we watched our new outfit go by and yet each of us were admittedly a little scared of the unknown

THAT we were going to get into. This was what we thought was going to be our big chance.

On the 21st. of March we started our advance with the 6th. Armored Division. We were following Combat Command "A", and were responsible for getting them through bad places, by filling in road craters and removing minefields. We also had to remove road blocks. But the 6th. went through Germany like the well known dose of salts. And we never did actually catch up to them although a couple of times we were only an hour behind them, but always something like a road block that they had by passed would come up, and we would have to remove it. Finally on the 23rd. of March they gave it up as a bad job. It was inevitable, they had tanks and half tracks and all we had was trucks. They outdistanced us so badly and the fighting had turned into so much of a rout, that we just weren't necessary. So we went back into the 110th. Group again.

One thing though we sure did get to see a lot of German Scenery, although the constant threat of enemy planes was constantly with us, and many the time we got so close that we could see the artillery behind us shelling a town just ahead. We were fortunate that there weren't more casualties among us, but "B" Company suffered a terrible blow up near Kaiserslautern, when two jet propelled planes and two Messerschmitts bombed and strafed their convey killing four men and wounding eight others, all of them badly enough to go to the hospital.

As I said we had a chance to see a lot of Germany on that triumphant ride through the Vaterland. The first German town we saw on our entry into Germany was a place called Ppfenhofen, and the first large town was Zweibrucken, we entered it only four hours after the 6th. had taken it, it was still burning badly and the smell of charred buildings and roasted flesh was still desirable in the dust and smoke laden air. We pulled on through the town to a high hill beyond. There we had noon chow, and exulted in the sight below us of the destruction of one of Germany's famous cities, and the sight along the road near which we were parked, of the hundreds of the once mighty German Wehrmacht, ingloriously being marched to the Prisoner of War Stockade. They passed in seemingly endless streams for a couple of hours, until we were once again on the road. This time we passed through Homburg, through which we had to clear a patch with our bull dozers because of the rubble strewn through the streets. It was here we got our first sight of Old Glory flying majestically over a German City. It was here also that we saw our first German civilians full of mixed emotions. Some were crying as they picked over their belongings, buried beneath bricks, burning floor beams, and dust covered for inches thick. Others looked at us with a malevolent look of hatred as we passed through their bomb and artillery shattered town.

The next town we came to was Landstuhl, and it was here that we really got a treat, every house in the town had a white flag hanging in a very prominent place. We could just imagine the hated Swastika hanging from the same positions, and thought to ourselves that it was very fitting that a white flag of surrender should replace the Black Swastika of tyranny. We saw many more towns with the white flags flying from their house tops, but none of them impressed us as much as those we saw the first time in Landstuhl. From here we went to the town of Kaiserslautern, but it was so badly beat up and the roads leading from it so cluttered up with devastated German equipment and dead German Soldiers, that we just had to back-track and go around another way. So that night we stayed in a little town called Olsbrucken. We stayed in a school house, and although we slept on the floor it was at least inside.

The following day we loaded up on our trucks again, and tried once more to catch up with the very elusive 6th. and the even more so elusive German Army. We again passed through many towns full of white flags, and spent that night in Kersheim-Bolanden, in a Railroad station. The boys had a good time opening up crates found in the freight buildings, but about the only thing worthwhile to be found

was a couple of Nazi flags. These were cut off by the Germans as souvenirs. It was the next day we gave it up as a bad job and the Battalion reassembled at Ppfenhofen, Germany.

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On the 24th. we moved again, this time to Monzerheim, there we rested up a bit, got our tools in shape, and had a shower, boy what a glorious feeling that was. But it seems as though I am getting slightly ahead of myself here. I forgot to mention that when we arrived at Offstein, someone discovered that we were too far up front. It was strange that we could hear the Artillery so well, and could almost smell the burning buildings in a town off to our right. But that wasn't the worst of it along

about 5:00P.M. the order comes down to man all 50 Cal. Machine Guns that German planes are in the region strafing bivouac areas. So we get ours all set, and that was our first night of many nights to follow that we sweated out "Bed-Check Charlie". When he finally did come over our bivouac, he was going so fast and it was so dark that we never did see him, and consequently didn't even get a shot at him. But you can bet your boots we were very properly scared, and those who hadn't dug fox-holes as yet, were quick to latch onto a shovel, and dug their first hole since Camp Gordon. In fact I even slept in mine. But that was the last time. It was just too damn uncomfortable, and I figured that if a bomb or bullet was going to come that close it would get me 2 feet under the ground as well as right on top. But that first night went by awful slow, what with Bed-Check constantly over head and the dull boom of the large cannon, with its heavy reverberations, and the sharp zing of ricocheting shrapnel. It was our first night under fire, and believe me none of us enjoyed it. The morning sun rise was a welcome sight, and there wasn't anyone late for breakfast, they were waiting in line even before the cooks had the stuff lined up for them.

Well as I say we moved back from there to Monzerheim, and every one breathed a sigh of relief. But it was short lived. For that night a rumor (boy how that word has been overworked. The army would not be the Army without a rumor or two floating around) started passing through the Company that we were slated to build a bridge across the Rhine. Oh, oh, we thought, this is really it. We have been lucky before. But we figured it would be impossible to build a bridge over the famous Rhine without many, many casualties. So we spent another restless night. Mainly because nothing was certain, no one was sure just what the following day would bring. And of course Good Ol' "Bed-Check" had to tank us in as usual. But dawn finally arrived, as it always does. And it wasn't long to our most extreme fears were confirmed. Yep, we had that bridge to build. An M-2 Heavy Treadway bridge. Something we had never handled before. We were oriented on our job that afternoon, and were told that the 45th. Division would make an assault crossing up near Hamm, and immediately after, we would start construction of our bridge, with the help of the 1019th. Engineer Treadway Bridge Company. They were the outfit that hauled the bridge and the equipment for its erection around from river to river. All kinds of dire thoughts chased each other through our minds. Remembered stories of other outfits that had built bridges across a lot smaller and less important rivers than the Rhine. And how their bridge had been constantly knocked out by 88 fire, and planes bombing. And how many casualties had resulted from such an operation. You can bet there wasn't a one of us that didn't go up there that night with a heart heavy laden with the sickening feeling that maybe now was the time. Maybe this time tomorrow night, some of us won't be here. I wonder who it will be, and such things as that. I really don't believe anyone actually thought he would be the one to get it, but everyone was wondering which of his buddies would be the unlucky ones.

This was the night that we saw the German planes being knocked out of the sky by our very accurate Ack Ack fire. As each one went down we silently cheered knowing that, that would be one less to

Bottom us tomorrow. But it was an awe inspiring sight to see the numerous planes that were dropped in an attempt to intercept our convey and find the artillery positions previously set up to support the German on the other side and make it easier for the 45th.

The tracer fire in the sky while those flares were like unto were hovering over head turning the dark night into a fiery red cur-daylight. It would have been possible to read a paper without even straining your eyes. It was with a silent prayer that we saw the last Jerry flare shot down and the protecting blanket of darkness once again descend and cover us from peering enemy eyes.

After the fireworks had ended, we once again took up our slow approach to the Rhine. Upon entering the town of Eich, we stopped to get our bearings and here once again we had the pants scared off us. An "88" shell landed about 50 yards from us jarring us all and sending us over the sides of the trucks looking and scurrying for a place of protection. But it must have been a stray one for no more landed and a few minutes later we pulled into our bivouac for the night, right outside of the town of Eich, and about a mile from the Rhine River. This was another time no one had to give any orders on the digging of fox-holes, for shrapnel and small arms fire was tearing the soft ebony of night into tiny little shreds and no one wanted to get into the same conditions. Our artillery, everything from a 105 to a 240, were duelling with the Jerries and their infamous "88", "Old Screaming Meemie", the Combat troops called it. This was the night that Novack our truck driver dug himself a fox-hole and crawled into it and tried to sleep with his steel helmet on. Me I just crawled up on the truck and curled up on the tool boxes. It wasn't a foolish disregard of the danger, it was just a feeling of fatalism, that if I was going to get it, well I was going to get it. So what, there wasn't anything to be done about it. And I sure couldn't see digging a hole. I felt too worried and too lousy.

Well we hadn't been laying down long when they called us to go back to the bridge assembly area and learn how to put the bridge up. Grumbling and sleepy eyed, we loaded on the trucks, and drove back to the Bridge Company. There we parked the trucks and broke up into crews, this had no sooner been done, and we had started down the road when that ominous whine of a falling shell rang in our ears. Someone shouted "HIT IT!", but everyone was a full 30 seconds ahead of him, and all of us were digging our noses in the soft earth, as we heard pieces of shrapnel pass over-head, and the fluttering whine of fast moving 50 calibre bullets. By now we were so scared that we didn't give a damn any more. But everyone was on the alert, and at the softest sound we all went into a half crouch, ready to hit the ground. Going up to the men of the Bridge Company who were to instruct us, we got our instructions and were anxious to be doing something so as to take our minds off the pregnant feeling of danger that was all about us. In a short time we had learned all their was to know about the bridge, after about two more attacks by Jerry's planes, and more machine gun bullets whining over our heads. (We found the next day as we attempted to put the bridge up that five effeur pontoons were useless to us due to the numerous bullet holes in them).

We returned to our bivouac area, and again tried to get some sleep but this was impossible. The constant whine of shells passing overhead, and the accompanying sharp sound of the shrapnel made even the strongest heart flutter more than enough to allow sleep. And I knew that God heard an awful lot of prayers that night. The man who said "There are no Atheists in the fox-hole" sure knew what he was talking about. Damn, and the ability to see what was going on was a welcome respite from the unknown dangers of a dark night. While we ate our breakfast of cereal and fresh fried eggs, we watched our P-47's strafe and bomb the town directly across the river from us. The Artillery was dug in directly behind us and we could turn to them and see the puff of smoke, tokening the dispatch of another missile of destruction for the Germans, and quickly turning our heads around could see the shell land about a mile away from us.

Then we saw a sobering sight. The infantry came slowly marching down the road, single file, silent, brave men on their way to another

Then begins with death, as an attempt to make things secure for us in our bridge job. Our progress the night before had been for ourselves,

should watch over these men in the fighting soon to come.

It wasn't long after this that we also got our orders to prepare to move up to the bridge site. Taking only our weapons and Gas Mask, we started off on our own little reconnaissance. As we arrived at the river we turned up it North, along a high levee, along which we had T-70's the famous tank destroyer, deployed being used as artillery, firing point blank

into the town across the River. The first shot they fired not only jarred us about two feet off the ground but also scared us the rest of the way up to a total of about four feet in all every damn one of us very nervously jumped.

Well to make along steady short, we started construction on the bridge about 10:00 A.M. on the morning of the 28th. of March, and under cover of the most beautiful airprotection, of about 24 P-47's, and completed its construction by 4:00 A.M. the following morning with nothing more serious happening than a damn sore and aching back. We had set a record of length of bridge built and time taken to construct, and no one had been hurt. Our luck had still held and we marched back to our bivouac outwardly exultant over our achievement, but inwardly humbly thankful to a merciful God that all that had started out had returned. Without wasting any time we loaded up on our trucks again, and pulled back into Monzenheim for a well deserved rest, and a chance to draw a safe breath, EXCEPT FOR? yeah you guessed it "Bad-Check" was waiting for us and paid us another visit that same night. But I don't believe anyone was aware of his presence other than the guards. Everyone else was still asleep, dreaming about reading about our achievement in ~~the~~ a future Stars & Stripes. The total length of our bridge was 1164 Ft. and that is an awful lot of bridge.

Once rested, we moved across the Rhine and set up our CP in a little town called Birkenbeek, about 30 miles south of Darmstadt, and about 75 miles south of Frankfurt. Here we spent Easter, in a drizzling rain that lasted for four days. We were glad to get out of there although we hadn't done anything to amount to a dang. And this time on or about the 4th. of April we moved to Dieburg, about 45 miles east of Darmstadt. Here as usual we just laid around, for our armies were moving so fast that it was impossible to keep up with them. We continued taking out road blocks and removing mine fields and filling road craters. And oh yes "Charlie" paid us a rightly visit, allowing no one an uninterrupted night's sleep. It was here that we heard about the treacherous people of the town opening fire on our Medics. And we looked forward daily to a chance to see this town, and the condition our Artillery left it in.

The following day on the 5th. of April we moved up to Bad Orb, the site of one of the infamous German Prison Lagers, or Concentration Camps. Here quite a few of our boys had just been liberated by our armored divisions. And when we arrived at our bivouac we found that our Group was still fighting for it. So naturally we had to set up Machine guns, and quite a few times during the night the silence was shattered by the sound of machine gun fire. We moved out again the following morning, this time to build a bridge up at a little town called Motgers near Bad Bruckenaau, about 150 miles east of Frankfurt. This took three days, and was commented on as being one of the finest fixed bridges built by any engineer outfit then in the area. Naturally we felt pretty good about this, and the fact that we latched on to a little Benedictine, that night suggested that we have a little celebration, so after taking some pictures to pictorial register the evidence of our work, we repaired to our barracks and proceeded to get a bit mellow. Our squad was the only one left there, so we had no one to tell us what to do or how to do it. It was a very pleasant arrangement, but ended all too soon. One morning about 6:00 A.M. a message came out for us to get ready to leave so for what seemed like the two millionth time we again loaded up our truck and took off to meet the GUNRAU. THIS TIME WE WERE HEARING FOR

but that went out now in a silent request that God

SAA, a few sized town about 200 miles south-west of Erfurt.

It was a bright warm and dusty day, I mean at
finally turned into that kind of a day. But when
we started out from our bridge site, it was cold.

we started out from our bridge site, it was colder than a Winter's day, with frost laden pines, and hoary ground. The sun did come out around noon, and we were still on the road. The dust was terrific, and in a very short time we all looked like Quarter-master troops. As usual the convoy got well screwed up, and once we climbed up a high mountain, went around

the top of it, hit the same road we came up on and naturally went right back down it again. I don't think there is a movement on record that we made without us getting a little lost before we arrived. Once we ran into a roadblock that hadn't even been touched yet, we sure thought our goose was cooked that time. For it stands to reason, if an obstacle is still in the road then the Infantry or Armor hasn't been there yet. Well anyways we did arrive at Saal, and the first thing we had to do was unload our trucks again and go out on Road Patrol.

We covered the net of roads in our area, and many, many times as we would come into a town we would look for the white flags, and not seeing any wonder if the town had been officially taken yet. We also saw snow that day. High up on a very large mountain, some of the fellows were hard to convince that it was snow, until we asked a native.

It was here in Saal that "Bed-Check", gave us our biggest scare. A convoy was moving along the MSR, about 11:30 that night and Jerry was out looking for just something like that. And these Joes driving the trucks in the convoy being in a hurry had their lights on. "Bed-Check", came swooping across our bivouac, and started strafing them, and we thought sure as hell he was after us. Whenever he would come over, naturally everyone would wake up and listen to him, and when we saw those tracers light up, and flash across the front of our tents, we all came out of our sacks without even bothering to open the zipper. But like every other night he soon swung around and we returned to try and recapture some sleep.

Our next move was to Rattlesdorf, about ten miles north of Bamberg, and about 60 miles north of Nurnberg, which hadn't been taken yet. In fact Bamberg had only been taken the night before and we could still see it burning in the distance. On this trip we passed through Coburg, the scene of quite a bit of fighting. It is hard to describe, the utter devastation that was to be found in these German towns, hardly one building left tenable, and as Jesus said about that city in Biblical history, "Let not one stone remain upon another". So also our Artillery officers and Air Force Commanders must have said to their men.

Nothing very exciting happened here, other than the timetable like visits of "BED-CHECK", and no matter how often he came over it was impossible to ignore him. There cannot be a man in the Army who remembers the annoyance of this louse that can honestly say he wasn't scared that some night he would find that damn Jerry plane diving at their pup-tents. It was here though we learned that we had been attached to the 45th. Division for work and Security, that is guard of important Military installations.

We left Rattlesdorf on a cold morning about 5:30 A.M. and arrived at a little town called Lauf, on the 17th. of April. And boy what a reception. All around us the heavy artillery had been dug in and were now shelling Nurnberg with a vengeance. Over head our fighter planes wheeled and dove time and again bobbing and strafing the city. The attack on Nurnberg had started about two hours previously and we were about ready to get in on the ground glow of one of the most historic battles of this war. For Nurnberg was the richest, most Nazified town in the German Reich. We were tired from our long ride, but all of us were keyed up and the constant boom of the heavy rifles did not make for peaceful sleeping. We only stayed here long enough to eat a quick meal of K-Rations and get a hot cup of coffee, and we were on our way again to get up closer to the fighting and make contact with the 179th. Inf. Div. to whom we had been

attached

We pulled into a tiny woods about a mile and a half

from the city, parked our trailers and sat down to wait for orders. In the meantime our officers who were to get a Liaison took off in search of the Infantry's forward CP. Having checked in with them they returned to us, gave each squad its orders, what regiment they would be working under, what was expected of us and so forth. But along comes Srafu, all orders cancelled. So we sit and wait again, only this time we go out into the road and watch the methodical destruction of the city of Nurnberg. The road that ran past the woods we were in ran right into the heart of the city. Going out beyond the screen of trees, with the aid of binoculars we could see our P-47's come diving in, drop their bomb, and following it to the ground see it strike its target. The artillery was still all around in back of us, and we could see them register hit after hit on the buildings directly to our front. But we soon got tired of this and in as much as chow (what there was of it) was ready, we returned to our bivouac, and having eaten something, most of us tried to get some sleep. But it wasn't long until we were given our orders again. This time to move to a town to the west of the city. We had been in a position directly to the north.

The town was Rothenburg. Unimportant in a military sense other than to give us lots of flat open land to deploy our artillery, and this town sure had artillery, and more artillery, and Jerry knew it too. It wasn't long after we had arrived in the town that he came over and gave us a good work out. You may think it is impossible to dig fox-holes in concrete, but there were many of us trying to do just that too often that night for comfort. We had taken houses to sleep in that night, and there were very few windows left in them when morning came. The people living in the houses before we came went into the cellars to live, and there were quite a few times I was wishing I could have been down there with them. I got knocked on my fanny, flying once by a big one Jerry dropped in a church yard across the street from the house in which we were staying. And from then on I wasn't worth a damn. Every time I heard the whine of an approaching bomb I would dive for the floor and try to crawl under the bed, or sofa, or anything at all that was available. I did very fortunately find a good hoard of very old liquor, and this helped to quite me a little. But we couldn't afford to get drunk, we didn't know what the morning would have in store for us.

The night was gotten through somehow, and the following morning we got our orders to report to the 3rd. Battalion, 179th. Infantry forward CP. The squad loaded up on the truck and we found our CP was located near Rogeldorf, a suburb of Nurnberg. After reporting in we were told to wait, that the fight wasn't going as well as they had expected, and we wouldn't be needed until the town had been entered. So apparently they were still trying to breach the City's outer defences. We laid around on the truck, reading, or just sleeping, until noon, then after chow of more K-Rations, I broke out the "Fifty", to test fire it, and found it had become loosened through the constant jolting around on its mount. It was a worried crew that worked feverishly on it for the next hour and a half trying to get it into serviceable condition. Working against hope that we wouldn't be called on until it was ready. Without that gun which is the same type as they use on our fighter planes, we felt that we would be lost. But it turned out alright and we got it back into shape.

About this time, three tanks, part of a Tank Battalion supporting the Infantry, pulled back to our CP. and one of the tankers came over and asked us if we had any Hand Grenades. We gave him what we had. And he told us that the fighting was very rough, that they had pulled back because a German shell had hit their 90MM. Cannon and had knocked it out of line, and they had to re-sight it. We hadn't done anything constructive up to now, and the grenades we had given them were so few, that we decided to help them out some more, so we took some half-pound blocks of TNT, taped some nails around them and

attaching a short fuse to it, were able to make them some good grenades

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FINALLY HEARING FOR ORDERS FOR THAT NIGHT, got orders that the battalion was moving up and we had to move with them. Although we only moved about a 1000 yds. into the town of Mogeldorf, it was still the only amount of ground that had been taken that day. The fighting had been see-sawing for the last 12 hrs., and with out any real advantage being gained by either side. The din of battle was terrific around where we

We had a truck at our disposal, and then after
parked the truck, and for our own protection we parked the truck behind a building facing the enemy lines, so that any shells which might chance to come over would have to pass through the building before hitting us. The city proper was burning badly now, and the area we were in was a large apartment house section. People were running around like mad trying to retrieve some of their possessions from their burning homes. We watched fascinated, as a little child at a Three ring Circus. Yet every now and then, the thoughts of what our job was to be worried us into a thought ful frown. The fellows asked me time after time, if I had found out yet what we were to do. But I couldn't answer them, because even the officers to whom I was directly responsible, didn't know how we jibed into their set-up. They actually weren't too concerned either, and I can't blame them for that, they had enough to do to worry about the job that was going on and not too well at that. Us being an extra added attraction, they had about decided to let us Shift for our selves.

Finally the Major came over looking for me and told me we had finally gotten our orders. So turning us over to a 1st. Lt. in the C.I.C. Section of their Division, he took us up to our first post, which happened to be the Post office, of Fumberg. When we did see what our job was our hearts fell, and our worries increased. The building was burning to the ground, and small arms fire could be heard all around us. We knew the lines couldn't be more than about 50 yds. in front of us, and here we were guarding a burning building. If the place had been intact, we could have seen some sense in it, but under the circumstances we thought it was a wasteful sacrifice of men. Here we were left to the possibility of being ambushed or even attacked through a flanking movement, with only 7 men, and all because the orders called for us to guard this important building. Which now in my estimation had lost all importance. I told the Lieutenant that I thought it would be advisable if he returned to Regimental Hdqs. and have us withdrawn. He said he would try and do it but couldn't promise us anything. He returned shortly after this and told us that there was no one with enough authority at Hdqs. to relieve us, so we would just have to make the best of a bad deal. He threw another bomb shell at us when he told us that we were no longer attached to the 3rd. Battalion, that they had moved back and the 2nd. Battalion moving in. Sometime during the night or first thing in the morning I was to try and get through to them some how and establish Liason. Well we really thought we were in for it then. No command other than our own, no one to get any orders from, the Post office, plus about six other buildings in the area burning merrily, and to top it off the small arms fire increases in its intensity, and leaving four men I took the other two to find out what it was all about. Coming to a break in the houses we saw some Infantry Doughs in the next street, walking in squad formation just playing away at everything, cleaning out the streets. But that wasn't the end of firing for us that night. Sporadic burst of rifle fire would go whizzing by us every now and then sending us into cover and on the alert for anything.

As things quieted down, except for intermittent shelling that was hitting about 100 yds to our front, jarring us every time they would hit. It took quiet a while to get used to them and not until the German people in the street had convinced us that they were our own shells did we stop jumping under the truck every time we heard the fluttering sound denoting the passage of another couple hundred pounds of death through the air. We had decided not to do any sleeping, but would make two men responsible for a certain shift of guard.

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in that way though we were either awake or alert. The night passed quickly with some liberated French coming up to us and bringing us some cognac, and being able to talk English. By dawn the firing had ceased almost completely, and we decided to build a fire to keep warm. Yep, there were burning buildings all around us but we had to build a fire in the middle of the street to keep the cool of early morning out of our bones.

As it got light enough to see, I took off in search of the 2nd. battalion's CP, and suddenly discovered that we were the only ones left in the town, not another soldier was in sight. We felt a little like orphans, but after having some breakfast, I again took off in another direction, and on this reconnaissance ran into our Officer. He informed us that he had moved his platoon CP during the night and seeing as how they hadn't relieved us as yet we would have to leave a guard on the Post Office. By now it was really necessary for the fire had almost burned out, and the main office being fire proof, and not having been touched by the fire was supposed to contain valuable papers. In fact we had to run some people away who tried to get in.

Leaving four men on the post, I pulled back into the platoon CP, and washed up a bit, and did a bit of exploring. On this trip I was fortunate enough to pick up pistols for all the boys who had come with me on this little excursion. Nothing that can ever happen to me will ever be able to make me feel any better than the looks on their faces when I handed each of them a much coveted pistol, and after taking all kinds of pictures of the happy event, I left. But I was back again real soon, for we had been relieved at last, and pulled all the way back to the Company CP at Rothernbach. But it was too quiet there, we knew, and by God if they didn't rack us out of our beds about 1:00 A. M. the next morning and ran us up to the new Forward CP of the 2nd. Battalion, this time we learned we had to guard some jet-propelled motors in freight cars up in the marshalling yards of Nurnberg. These cars also contained quite a quantity of ammunition and explosives and timing devices for setting booby-traps.

After posting our guards, I returned to the CP to act as Liaison Officer. The following morning I had to go out and check some cars for ammunition, and when I returned I found I had been relieved, but again only temporarily. For I no sooner returned to the Company than I found I had to go back to The Infantry CP again. But this time they had moved, and in the course of trying to find them we had to go through our furthest most lines and ended up with quite a few Germans out after our hide, firing at us with everything but the kitchen sink. To say we were scared would be a gross understatement, we had that Peep doing everything but "Hip+Ups"! trying to dodge those damn bullets. But in all ended well and we again found the CP, and after establishing our location with them, so that they could get in touch with us if we were needed we went back to the Company. But this Merry-Go-Round was still not over. We had no sooner gotten back with them than we moved again this time right up into Nurnberg, itself. It was here that we saw the famous stadium where Hitler held all his big Nazi meetings. It was during every impressive ceremony that we saw them blow the large Swastika from the top of it and replaced it with the American Flag. After this was accomplished, Gen. Patch, and Gen. Patton awarded high meriting awards to deserving Infantry-men.

Nurnberg, was captured, but only after the whole historic town had been almost leveled to the ground. There was one building left standing on the outskirts of the town, which the Nazis planned ruling the world from. It was being made into the form of the old Coliseum in Rome. We had a job there to search the whole building from top to bottom looking for SS troops, with orders to shoot them on sight. This was a very ticklish operation, and we moved through the building very cautiously. We found no one but

moved through the building cautiously. We found no one but the next morning the 3rd Div. took over and found 8 of them in the

hospital set up in the building. They took them

out into the yard and shot them, every one. This was little enough to do to these monsters in human form. After our search of the Coliseum, we hid around a few days and then took out after the 45th. who had moved on to the south, with Munich as their next objective. In doing this we moved from Nurnberg about the 23rd. of April, and set up our CP at Weitzburg about 45 miles south of Nurnberg.

Here we worked a while repairing a blown bridge, and in a few days moved about 20 miles further south to a town by the name of Langen. It was here during the night that quite a few shots were heard, and almost everyone thought we had been attacked. But the following morning we learned that it was merely the end of two more SS Officers. You may think that we were pretty cold blooded as it concerned these men. But one of our companies had been ambushed by some of them and had killed and wounded some of their men, attempting to surrender after they had run out of ammunition. But the men would not let them surrender, and killed them all but one who refused to come out of his hole. So the boys merely got hold of some dynamite and blew him out of his hole. He had dug his own grave and all our men did was provide the necessary means for covering him over. From that time on, we had orders not to take any prisoners. And it was very happily carried out.

It was while we were at Langen that "A" Company attempted to build an Infantry Foot Bridge across the Danube in support of the 45th. Division's drive on Munich, but the stream was too swift, and firepower of the enemy too severe. The Battalion lost another officer up here and one man is still unaccounted for, having been carried down stream by the torrential current.

We moved from there to Wassertrudingen, and here joined the 5th. AAA Group, to become part of the 7th. Army Security Command. This job called for the guarding of military installations, especially hospitals, that had German soldiers within its walls. We also assisted the Military Government, in its organization of the governing of the small outlying towns that they couldn't get to.

We moved from Wassertrudingen to Schrobenhausen, which was situated about 50 miles north of Munich. Here we also performed the duties of the 7th. Army Security Command. This did not require any hazardous work on our part, and we had decided that we had at last hit a soft job. We were eating good, and had everything our own way. The war was still on, and we could go out to any of the farms in the area, and demand anything we wanted and get it without any trouble at all. We still had enough to drink to relieve the monotony, and had radios to receive the news. Which in those days sure looked good. And to us it even looked better, for we figured if we were in the Security Command when the war ended we would remain in it and that would relieve us of any more worry as far as the Pacific was concerned. Naturally all of us were sweating out the Pacific now that we didn't have any Germans to bother us. A G+I has to have something to worry about or he is not happy. But none of us were prepared for what was to come.

About May 1st. We were ordered to move up to Dachau. This was the right site of the most infamous concentration Camp in all Germany. We had heard many stories concerning the tortures perpetrated at this Charnel House, and the thousands of people who had died there at the hands of their SS Guards. But as I say all of us had taken these stories as part of a general propaganda campaign to arouse our anger against the Germans. When we first entered the town we questioned a couple of men who we saw walking in striped uniforms. We learned that that was the uniform of Dachau. They told us that the whole camp was full of dead bodies that the Germans had murdered in the last week. They said the figures would run into at least ten thousand. They told us of how every day someone would be murdered in cold blood as a warning to the other inmates that they were the slaves and the Germans were the masters. The men looked half starved and one of them had a pronounced Tubercular Cough.

and baring their backs showed us the half-healed welts from the torturer's whip. We had heard enough to put us into a black rage. But again we reasoned this could not be, this town couldn't look like it could foster such a Frankenstein. For as yet we hadn't seen with our own eyes. We only had the words of persons who had been there, and we figured that they would naturally exaggerate, so as to gain sympathy for themselves. They were trying to bum cigarettes from us, but we were

hurting ourselves and could only give them a few.

We moved on then to our billets. And soon after this we had our orders to take over the guarding of the Camp. Now at last we would have an opportunity to see these things that so many people had told us about.

Our first glimpse of the Camp was from a wide road that encircled it taking us past the SS Officers Barracks, and a Great Gate having an enormous German eagle on top of a Swastika. Then coming to the main entrance, we were passed by our guard at the gate, and started posting our guards at all the entrances and exits from the grounds. The object was to keep the inmates from roaming the streets and to prevent any SS men who had taken refuge in the hospital from also making their getaway.

The next morning I went on a little reconnaissance, and coming to a high wall walked along it until I found a gate. Entering this the first thing to greet my eyes were the Dog Kennels, which housed the vicious dogs that they used to torture these poor unfortunate people with. The would strip the prisoners nude, then hanging them up by their thumbs so that their toes barely touched the floor, would then let the dog or dogs into the pen that they would hage the prisoner in. The dog having been fed on nothing but raw meats and having been trained to just such work would wait on the keepers next move. Which usually would be to touch the prisoner on his privates with a stick, the dog at this command would jump up and attempt to bite at the object touched by the stick. In my mind this was not only inhuman but a sure sign of degenerate, sadistically, psychopathic tendencies. The dogs by now had all been killed by the American Soldiers who had taken the town, but some of the brutes were still lying in their kennels. They were the largest most vicious looking animals I have ever seen in my whole life.

From the kennel area I came to a path and turning into it came to another large gate which opened into a yard. At first I didn't notice what was directly in front of my eyes. But suddenly it dawned on me what I was looking at. There not more than 50 yards away was a huge pile of nude, partly decomposed bodies. I had stumbled on the Charnel House of the Devil himself. The Crematorium that we had heard so much about, but really actually doubted the existence of. The bodies were stacked like so much cord wood, and had been dumped there in anticipation of their being burned the following day, but the butchers had been interrupted in their work by the arrival of our troops. There must have been at least 300 bodies in that stack alone. To go further into the description of this sight and the stench of decomposition and death that hung over the pile of bodies, would turn not only your stomach, but I am afraid it would give me the Screaming-Ecnieles AGAIN. Walking past the pile I entered the Crematorium itself, but just entering the door was enough, the stench here was enough to floor a person, and all the rooms were full of bodies in every state of decomposition having been liberally sprinkled with lime.

I felt my marbles slowly starting to slowly come up so I left there with as much speed as possible. Never will I ever forget that sight, nor the awful smell that surrounded the place. All of these people had either been shot through the head mercifully or bashed in the head sadistically, or had tortorously starved to death in a planned campaign of extermination. This can be understood when it is known that the majority of these dead were either

These same men took off their uniform jackets

Piles, Piles, or Jaws

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itical prisoners from other countries, such as Holland, France, Norway, were treated as well as could be expected under the circumstances. That is as long as they worked at the job assigned to them. If they attempted to evade working they were whipped the same as the others and put on shorter rations than usual. Which according to our standards are less than starvation rations. In talking to them we learned more about how

The Russians and Jews had been treated. A Hollander told us of an incident that had happened two days before our arrival. He spoke of 350 women having been marched 200 miles from another Camp that had been threatened by our troops. Immediately after their arrival they were fed and bedded down, in the morning they were told to march over to an assigned area and to remove their clothes. There they were told they would be given new clothing. Having done this as ordered the women marched into the Crematorium unknowingly and were burned alive.

I know that this sounds incredible in the telling of it. That it seems impossible that they would go to so much trouble. But it was all to impress the other prisoners of how little they should value their lives.

The Camp had now been Quarantined because of a fear on our Medics part that the Typhus then so rampant through the camp would spread into an epidemic. Anyone entering had to be dusted with a delousing powder, and no one other than authorized persons were allowed to leave. We were inoculated that same day. At this time I took our Medical officer over to see the bodies. By now the Macabre pile had become famous, and people from every country gathering evidence against the Germans, were there checking figures and facts concerning the deaths. There were reporters, photographers, artists, diplomats, and high ranking officers of every country in Europe. As we entered the yard, an Air Force Officer who was taking Motion pictures, of the assemblage and bodies, came over to us and asked us to pose near the unholy mess. We agreed and he took about four pictures of each of us. Saying that he wanted to show the people back home how we felt about it. He mentioned the fact that he didn't think we would have to do any acting. And boy he was right. We got up to within about two feet of the bodies and there the stench hit you in the face like a sledge hammer. Disgust, nausea, and livid hatred for the people who had perpetrated such a crime were all mirrored in our faces. I was very glad that he was competent and didn't take any longer than necessary, for even though I had seen them the day before I still couldn't stand the smell or the sight. My stomach was doing flip-flops.

Up to now they had been trying to burn the bodies, but each day they would find more, and the concentration area of the camp would yield about a hundred more deaths a day. From those who were so far gone in the stages of malnutrition, that nothing could be done to save them. Naturally this over taxed the facilities at the crematorium, so they decided to dig a common grave on the outskirts of town and lead the bodies into carts and take them through town there to bury them. I thought this was a capital idea. For I wanted to see the reaction of the people of Dachau, when they saw the results of the fiendish regime that they had fostered and Reiled for the past ten years.

As the carts, slowly filled through town with their grisly cargo, the people stared at them with handkerchiefs held to their noses. If they saw an American looking at them they would shrug their shoulders as though to say, "I had nothing to do with this. This is the work of the Nazi. I was never a Nazi, never did I know this was going on." And they actually had the effrontery to think that we were ignorant enough to believe that they didn't know that such a thing existed in their city. I heard another girl say "It is a shame to be a German". She was right. The Germans have more to repay than they can ever atone for. And if the Combined

The Germans who were at this camp, and the pol-

Military Government, do not do something about it, then may God have

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thousands of our American boys gave up their lives.

Every day for a week, seven to ten cart loads of bodies would pass by on their way to the common burial ground. And still the towns people denied having any knowledge that such a condition existed. They admitted they knew about the Camp. But they were adamant in their denial of being cognizant of the tortures and deaths that were a daily part of Camp Dachau.

The prisoners had a bit of a field day when our tanks appeared at the Camps Gates. They immediately turned on their craven guards and evidence of their prowess was to be found in the dead bodies of their tormentors which could be seen laying in a multitude of grotesque positions. None had been mercifully shot. All had been treated the same way that they had treated the prisoners. They were cruelly beaten, and in some cases were left for dead, but didn't die until hours later. For signs of their death struggles could be seen in the scuffed ground around their bodies.

Some of the big shots of the camp were taken prisoner in the town. They were found living in homes as respectable citizens having threatened the tenants of the house with death and worse if they gave them up. But the people in the homes that the SSer's had hidden in feared the American Authorities more, and succeeded in letting us know where we could pick up these fiends. When captured, they were taken back to the scene of their crimes, and given a chance to confess to some of the atrocities that they had committed. But the Germans were a hard lot, and no amount of persuasion either harsh or gentle would sway them in their determination not to talk. They knew they would be shot whether they talked or not, so they decided that the least said the better off they would be.

But one of our boys decided this issue for them. Having gotten just a little tight, and having just come from seeing the bodies in the Crematorium, he had heard about the Authorities having this Lager-Fuerher in custody. So he was inquisitive to see just what kind of a toad this guy was. Coming into the room where he and his assistants were sitting in glowering silence neither answering questions, or looking from right to left, but just straight ahead. This boy realizing what was going on, and just mad enough to want to do something about it, asked for permission to try and make them talk. Having been granted this permission, he walked over to the Lager-Fuerher, who was wearing glasses, at the time. Drawing back his fist, the boy whacked the German a beauty right smack on the nose sending his glasses spinning, these the boy ground into the floor, and then proceeded to work out on the German louses nose, hitting him there in the exact same spot about a dozen times. This was too much for the Kraut, and asking for mercy, agreed to write. Reluctantly, this outraged American youth, desisted, and was disappointed when the others followed their leaders action, rather than go through what he had experienced.

The name of Dachau, will long remain in the memories of the world. And to perpetuate this name as being synonymous with all that is horrible in the annals of Nazism, should have its name changed to "DEATH."

When Peace was announced on the 8th. of May, none of us could celebrate it or feel much emotion over the event that we had wished for and prayed for, month after monotonous death laden month. We had all been emotionally washed out. It was impossible to feel cheerful in a town so full of horror and grief. Naturally we were all thankful. And the fact that we could now relax, and take a breather, was a welcome respite. We had been relieved of all duties and were now just laying around again sweating out the Pacific. We knew that none of us would have enough points to go home on, but we were all looking forward to the announcement about the Army of Occupation.

mercy on their souls for they will have paid
dramally in their fall for which

I AM GOING TO LEAVE THIS LETTER WITH OUR
sweating out our future in the Pacific. But before
signing this to this completely, I feel a summary is
needed to properly bow this feeble effort at history
out through the wings of the stage of time.

To sum up in a few words, the Battalion establish-
ed 21 CEs, built 12 bridges, was responsible for the
largest known area ever given to an Engineer outfit,
namely 1100 Sq. MI. Had 10 men killed, 1 missing in
action and 19 wounded. This represents a better than average record
of achievement, and a better than average record of fatalities and
casualties. We were a small unit performing only a small part in
a very large war. But what we did, was done with a coordinated
spirit of cooperation, enthusiasm, and vigor not to be topped by
any other outfit of its kind in the MTO.

The Major in his letter of commendation on our building of the
bridge across the Rhine, very ably puts into words what has been in
all our hearts ever since we landed in France. I quote his letter

AEO 655 US Army
28 March- 45

Subject-Commendation.

To-Commanding Officers, Companies "A", "B", "C".

- 1- The 257th. Engineer Combat Battalion, built the fourth floating
bridge across the Rhine River, and the third ever to be built in
wartime.
- 2- You started to build the bridge under several handicaps. You
did not get much sleep the previous night due to necessary prelimin-
ary work and enemy action. Most of you had little if any experience
with Treadway bridge construction. It was necessary that you be
moved to near bank save all hours before the actual time arrived to
build the bridge, where you were subjected to mortar and small arms
fire, and due to the rain, you were very wet and cold.
- 3- In spite of these handicaps and the disagreeable weather in the
morning you entered into your work with commendable enthusiasm and
vigor. The total elapsed time was about fifteen hours, but if the
equipment had been made available, I am sure you could have done it
in nine hours, thereby breaking the record. As far as I am concern-
ed, under the circumstances you did break it. This crossing was a
very important operation. The manner in which you all worked, and
conducted yourselves during the entire time was a great credit to
the Battalion, and I want you to know that I am extremely proud
of everyone of you.

VINCENT J. BEALLIS
Major CE
Commanding.

The above letter not only describes the manner in which we
built our bridge across the Rhine, but also the manner in which
we tackled every job assigned. I am proud to have been a part of
the 257th. Engineer Combat Battalion, and although we didn't
garnish any outstanding laurels or awards, we did an Army job in
an Army like way. Every man did his part, and every man feels that
through his concerted efforts to do his job in the best way possible
no matter what the handicap might be, has helped in his own small
way to make possible the world that the boys in our Battalion died
for, and all the American men who fell in Battle, willingly gave
their lives for.

Well honey that winds it up. I started this out to just be
a normal list of all the places we had been, but ended up writing
the history of all we had gone through. I have missed some things
but surely from what you have read you will get some idea of the
job we did over here in Europe for the past nine months.

I can't say anymore, I'm all wrote out and thunk out. So to
make a long story short, so long darling, be seeing you soon