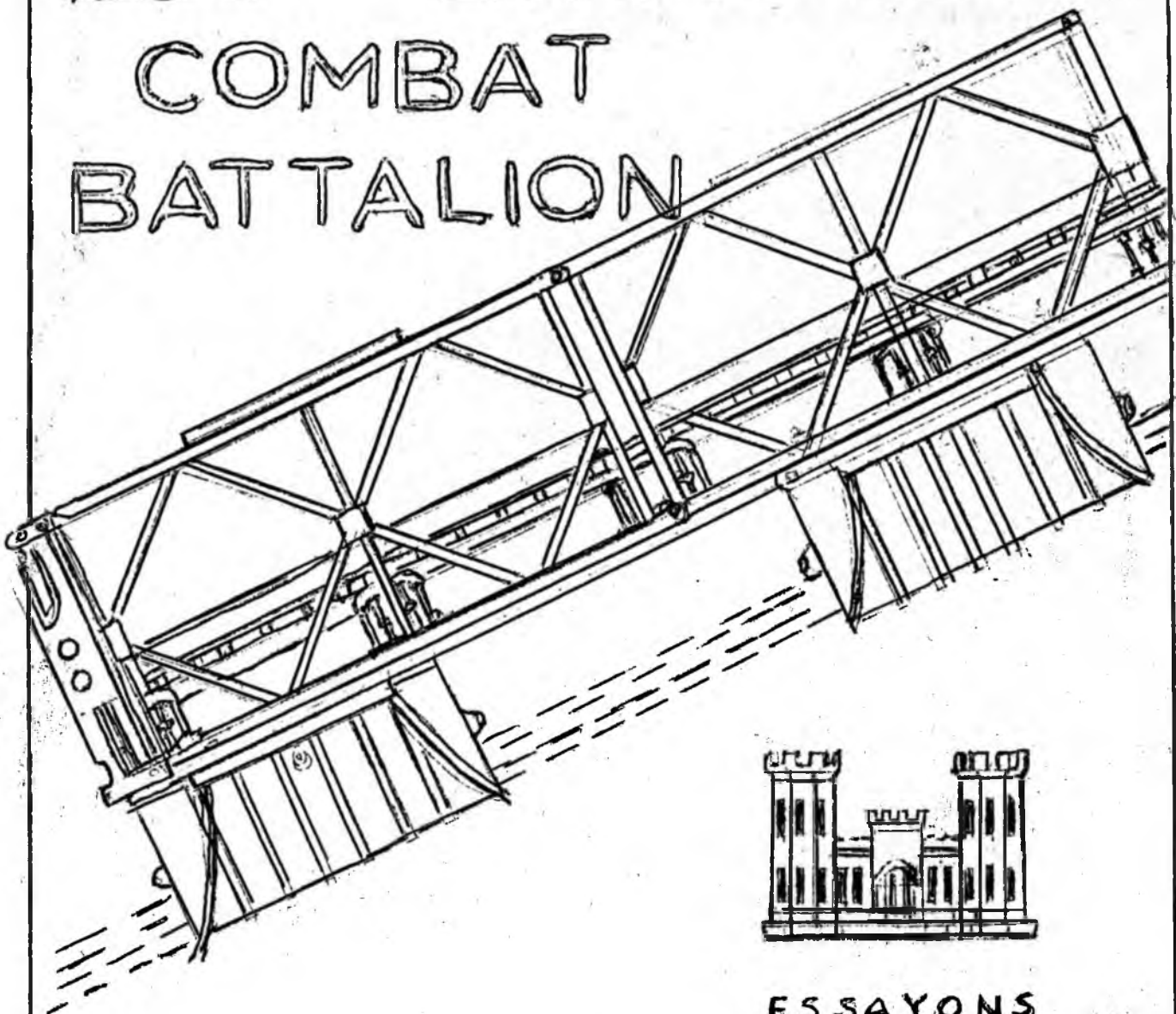


UNIT
HISTORY
1285TH ENGINEER
COMBAT
BATTALION



ESSAYONS

DRAWN BY VALLACQUA

BATTALION HISTORY

1285TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

A cadre of 14 officers and 64 enlisted men from the 259th Engineer Combat Battalion was assigned to activate the 1285th Engineer Combat Battalion at Camp Howze, Texas on 3 April, 1944. Commanding officer of the new organization was Major John A. Morava, Captain Gerald E. Wilcox was assigned as executive officer and Captain Douglas C. Seely was plans and training officer. Other key officers activating the battalion were: Lieutenants Crawford C. Donnelley, Intelligence Officer, Edmund Divito: Adjutant, Eugene M. Lutz, Supply Officer, and Harry West, Clarence A. Walker, Ivand Pierce and Harold W. Lubchansky Commanding A, B, C and Headquarters and Service companies respectively.

On 25 April, Major Morava was relieved from assignment with the organization and Major Hugh E. Templeton assumed command. Cadre training was begun during the second week in April and continued until the second week in July when fillers were assigned to the battalion to bring it to T/O strength in both officers and enlisted personnel. The new fillers were for the most part men who had been transferred into the Corps of Engineers from other branches of the service. This fact presented a serious training problem to the cadre. However, on 17 July, 1944 the initial training period of seventeen weeks was begun, at this time the battalion was under the 1152nd Engineer Combat Group.

In early August, the battalion was assigned to the 1161st Engineer Combat Group the I.T.P. training period was cut to eleven weeks, and an accelerated training program went into operation. On 7 September, notice that the battalion was in the A-4 priority group for movement overseas was received: However scheduled training in floating bridges for the following week delayed the initial T/O & E and TE-21 inspection until the third week in September. On 10 September, the unit moved into Bivouac at Lake Murray, Oklahoma (near Ardmore) a distance of 54 miles from Camp Howze. The move to Lake Murray was accomplished by Motor Convoy and the morale of all troops conducting the move was high. The week 10 September to 16 September was passed in constructing various pontoon bridges, infantry support rafts and infantry foot bridges by the battalion. The weather was exceptionally fine during this period and even the most newly made engineers in the battalion seemed to take rapidly to the idea of bridge building. During these maneuvers, Major Templeton was seriously injured while riding in a vehicle driven by the T/5 Bard. The accident hospitalized the Major and on 15 September Captain Walter N. Brandon assumed command of the battalion.

Upon returning to Camp Howze, the battalion received readiness dates for overseas shipment as follows; Equipment, 12 October, Advance Party; 18 October, and Personnel; 1 November. The initial showdown inspections were conducted on 21 September and shortages in equipment were reported. The end of September found the battalion preparing to enter a five weeks intensive training period.

Major Willam H. Weddle assumed command on 2 October and the same day orders were received to move the battalion to Camp Bowie, Texas. The Battalion moved by motor convoy on 4 October departing Camp Howze at 0700 hours and arriving at Camp Bowie at 1730. Despite cold and rainy weather the moral of the troops was comparatively high. Immediately upon arrival at Camp Bowie, the battalion began packing impedimenta and T.A.T. equipment. At this time the unit was assigned to the 1125th Engineer Combat Group and orders to complete the scheduled period of intensive training were received: but desperately as this training was needed, the battalion seemed so submerged by the never ending details of showdown inspections and packing that little actual training was completed. Readiness dates were changed to the following; Personnel; 20 November, Advance Party; 6 November, and equipment; 11 November.

The advance detachment consisting of LT. Dale J. Baughman, warrant Officer August J. Gomes, and T/5 Charles Heath Departed from New York harbor aboard the S.S. Acquitinia on 11 November. On 23 November the battalion entrained for the overseas staging area at Camp Shanks New York where final preparations were accomplished. On 8 December the battalion embarked upon the T.E.S. Uruguay which sailed from New York on the following day. The crossing was uneventful as the convoy encountered calm weather and no opposition from enemy forces; hence moral continued high despite the crowded conditions aboard ship. After 13 days at sea the Uruguay docked at Southampton, England on 21 December and the following day the orinization disembarked and moved by train to Addlestop, Oxfordshire, England.

While at Addlestop, the battalion encamped on a spacious country estate belonging to a Lord Leigh. Lord Leigh's castle served as battalion headquarters during this time. Upon arriving in the U.K. the unit was assigned to the 1133rd Engineer Combat group and plans for unit training were made. However the dawn of 1945 brought with it a change in training plans. Three officers and thirteen enlisted men from the 69th infantry division were attached for the purpose of instituting and supervising a one month training program in infantry tatics and weapons for all sixth and seventh class privates. The battalion was reorganized into two provisional training companies of two platoons each and on 8, January 1945 the 1285th Engineer Combat battalion temporarily forgot it's attachment to the Corps of Engineers and threw itself whole-heartedly into the task of training it's men as infantry reinforcements in order to pursue the training to the maximum, technicians and non-commission officers were used on overhead positions such as guard and kitchen police. This period of training was marked by intense cold and heavy snows: but both the privates and NCOS exhibited extremely high morale in furthering their respective assignments. The cadre from the 69th division was released from assignment after the first week of training and the battalion was forced to continue infantry training without the benefit of their guidances. Despite the cold approximately one half of the training time during this period was spent in Bivouac and on field problems. On 22 January the battalion moved by train to Upton Lovel, near Salisbury where three days of range and squad firing were conducted.

Unit training was first begun during the first week in February. This training cycle provided the battalion with its first opportunity for working together as a coordinated team and enabled the staff sections to begin operational training. The courses of instruction were completed in February and March at the Bailey Bridge School in Wallingford. All personnel received training in the construction of various types of fixed and floating Bailey Bridges. The proficiency developed at this time was clearly demonstrated during the unit's operational

activities on the continent. Despite the battalions comparatively inexperience with Bailey Bridges, Company A established school records in the construction of the class 40 double-double fixed Bailey and the class 70 floating Bailey. All troops during these periods of instruction exhibited remarkable stamina in their ability and willingness to work long hours at a difficult task.

In late February the battalion was assigned to the 12th Army group and was later attached to the 15th Army and XXII Corps. In early April final preparations were made for the move to the continent and upon receipt of movement orders the organization departed from the Addlestrop by motor convoy on 8 April 1945, Arriving Weymouth, England the following morning. After breakfast at the staging area, the unit again entrucked for Portsmouth, where landing crafts were boarded. The convoy left England in early evening on 9 April and after a smooth crossing, disembarked at LeHarve, France the following morning. Upon arriving at the staging area at Camp Twenty Grand, the unit was ordered to move immediately to Julich, Germany. The advance party was sent forward to establish liaison with XXII Corpsto which the battalion had been assigned. Reconnaissance patrols were sent forward early on the morning of 12 April and later the same morning the battalion departed by motor convoy for Pontaine Lieveque, Belgium where in halted that night and the next morning continued the march to Julich. Upon arriving in Julich the battalion received further orders to continue to Kempen, Germany, which move was accomplished on the same day.

The battalion became operational immediately upon arriving in Kempen where it became attached to the 1133rd Engineer Combat group with the primary mission of providing engineer support for the 94th infantry division. By the morning of 14 April, reconnaissance elements of this unit were active on both banks of the Rhine river in the vicinity of Duisburg gathering technical data incident with the construction of class 40 floating Bailey bridges in this area. The S-4 section took over the operation of the 9th Army water point in Kempen on this date and supplied water to the 94th division as well as to units of the British 2nd Army.

During the period 14 April to 19 April the battalion was primarily engaged in reconnaissance on both banks of the Rhine River from Duisburg south to Cologne. These missions included site reconnaissance for three floating Bailey bridges and one treadway bridge ultimately constructed across the Rhine by elements of the 1133rd group. On 19 April the second platoon of company B was ordered to clear the buildings and grounds of a small town south of Dusseldorf prior to the occupation of the site by headquarters XXII Corps. On 21 and 22 April company C was ordered to Nuess where the first and third platoons constructed the near and far shore approach roads for a treadway bridge across the Rhine at that point. On 20 April the S-3 section took over the operation of Rhine river guage #75 near Rhinehausen.

On 16 April, the initial site reconnaissance for a floating Bailey bridge at Rhinehausen was conducted and the preliminary survey of the site forwarded to group. At this time it was noted that conditions afforded by the site would tend to present technical difficulties in the actual construction. On 18 April tentative plans for the construction of a class 40 bridge at this site were received and the following day an exact survey of the site was completed.

Although there were existing ferry piers on each side of the river, it was decided not to utilize them in the construction of the bridge for it would take longer to repair the piers than to construct new abutments for the bridge. The final survey indicated that the bank conditions on the near shore together with the limited standard length of the landing bay were such as to place the near shore abutment in an undesirable location in case of rising water. It was therefore determined to blast a slip on the near shore of sufficient size to permit the locations of abutments which would be out of danger from high water and at the same time provide enough water for the construction of an end floating bay properly spaced from the abutment. B Company was assigned this mission and used a total of 11 tons of explosive in blasting the slip. The completed slip was 200 feet long and 150 feet wide. Actual construction on the bridge did not commence until 23 April when final orders for its construction were received from XXII Corps.

Material for the construction was convoyed to the site by truck from Maastrich, Holland, and the problem of supply thus presented became the controlling factor over the construction time. At one time construction was held up for two days due to the insufficient supply of panel pins on hand. Aside from the difficulties of supply and the technical problems presented in the layout of the site, the construction of the bridge went smoothly and shortly before midnight on 28 April, the task was completed and the first vehicle crossed the river into Duisburg. The completed bridge was named the Gerow Bridge in honor of LT. General Leonard T. Gerow, commanding general of the fifteenth Army and was 1534 feet long, the longest floating Bailey bridge constructed over flowing water in the European theater of operations. The only casualties sustained in the construction of the bridge were in company "C." An accident which occurred at the Ernie Pyle bridge constructed by the 1288th Engineer Combat Battalion when an anchored coal barge broke its mooring upstream from the reconstruction, made it advisable to sink all barges and tugs upstream from Duisburg to Dusseldorf and in completing this mission one of our vehicles struck a German 'R' mine injuring LT. Grogan and Staff SGT. Ricker of C company. A few days after the completion of the bridge, it was renamed the triumph bridge.

On 30 April orders were received from group to send One Line Company to Cologne to provide technical assistance to the 283rd Engineer Combat Battalion which was constructing a class 40 floating Bailey bridge at a point south of Cologne. Company C was assigned this mission; however, the original intension of providing merely technical assistance did not prove to be feasible as the 283rd was entirely unfamiliar with the construction of the task. On 2 May, Company B was also placed on the job and the following day the bridge was completed.

On 1 May, the battalion was relieved from its tactical assignment to the 94th division and reassigned to the 250th field artillery group and again on 6 May the unit was reassigned to the 61st field artillery brigade. During this period company A was constantly employed with the maintenance of the Triumph Bridge. Company B was assigned the mission of removing a 180 foot fixed double-double bailey bridge on highway M-58 south-west of Wessel and replacing the bridge with a two-way class 40 timber tressel bridge. However site conditions were such as to render the construction of a tressel bridge at this point inadvisable and after serious deliberation it was decided to replace the bridge with a fill and culvert. This decision later proved to be extremely costly as the gap to be filled was over a small pond and was of such depth that vast quantities of crushed rock, gravel and earth had to be used to complete the task.

The Fill was finally finished, however, but it's life was of short duration as heavy traffic over the road necessitated constant maintenance at the point and one time resulted in what amounted to the near reconstruction of the fill. The second and third platoons of company C removed a 130 foot double-double fixed bailey from over the Erft Canal at Epinghoven and hauled the materials to the group dump at Kempen. The third platoon of company C was also employed at Badburg where they completed a two-way timber tressel bridge which had been started by the 1251st Engineer Combat Battalion.

Upon cessation of hostilities, 8 May 1945, the battalion was assigned an area of responsibility extending from Wessel on the north, south along the Rhine River to a point ten miles north of Cologne, and west to the Dutch border. The unit was responsible for all engineer works necessary within the area, with primary importance attached to the maintenance of the road and bridge network and to the clearance of debris and rubble from the war torn streets of such large cities as Krefeld, Muchen Gladbach, Nuess, Viersen, Geldern, Moers and Rheydt. To accomplish this task the services of large numbers of German civilians were obtained, these laborers worked directly under the supervision of local burgermiesters who were in turn responsible to the newly created roads section of the unit. The second platoon of Company a removed a 40 foot double-single bailey bridge on highway N58 between Geldern and Wessel and replaced it with a one-way 70 two-way 40 timber tressel bridge at this time.

In order to insure constant maintenance of the roan net, daily road patrols were sent out on motor bikes and jeeps to cover the many hundreds of miles of road under battalion jurisdiction, but so vast was the area to be covered that it became necessary to supplement these patrols with frequent reconnaissance by air. At this time the battalion was also assigned the mission of completing a systemized reconnaissance and inventory of all industrial plants and materials within the area of responsibility. On 14 May the third platoon of company B was sent to Muchen Gladbach to operate a sign factory supplying corps units. This task was continued until 31 May. On 20 May 1945 this unit was alerted for redeployment to the Pacific theater of operations and relieved of all tactical assignments.

A training schedule stressing training in Japanese tactics, river crossing operations, small arms firing and the firing of crew served weapons was immediately initiated and continued for nearly a month. During the first week in May the battalion received a commendation from Major General Harmon, commanding General XXII Crops for outstanding achievement in the construction of the triumph bridge. On 13 June the battalion was assigned to the 1148th Engineer Combat group and on 16 June was relieved from all former assignments and reassigned to XXLLL Corps with orders to move immediately to Ausweiler in southern Germany.

Leaving Kempen on 16 June 1945 two months after its arrival in that city, the battalion moved south to Ausweiler by motor convoy and was assigned to the 1124th Engineer Combat group. During it's sojurn in southern Germany the organization bivouacked in a temporary cantonment near a former German officers training center and maneuver area where further training preparing for the move to the P.T.O. was conducted.

On 27 June the battalion again entrucked, the time for the Arles staging area near Marseilles, France. Nightly haults were made at Nancy Dijon, and ST. Rambertall in France. On

30 June the unit arrived at its new home in Arles. Processing equipment for redeployment was speedily completed and further orders were awaited. At this time the morale of the battalion ebbed to its lowest point. The staging area provided few of the many entertainment features so widely heralded and the men found the combination of dust, heat and inactivity difficult to bear.

On 22 July, impediment was loaded on liberty ships which departed shortly thereafter for the Pacific. During the third week of July the battalion received a letter dated 5 July, 1945, from U.S.F.E.T. headquarters awarding this unit the bronze battle star for participation in the campaign of central Germany.

While at Arles, fortunate few of the men were able to obtain seven day recuperation furloughs at the rest areas on the Riviera. Activity for the most part consisted of organized athletics, short passes to the nearby town and the meager entertainment afforded by the few USO shows which played at the camp. A mild attack of hysteria seized the battalion on the night of 11 August 1945 when the false rumor that Japan had surrendered spread like wildfire through the staging area. However, after several thrilling minutes of wild enthusiasm the rumor was quelled and the demonstrators dispersed.

On 14 August, the battalion entrained for the Port of Marseilles and embarked aboard the USS General Breckenridge for redeployment to the Pacific theater. The ship left the harbor on 15 August with all aboard resigned to the long and tedious voyage through the Panama Canal to the Philippines. However on 17 August, a scant half day past the Straits of Gibraltar, official notification came over the ship's loud speaker system that orders had been received changing the destination of the Breckenridge to New York Harbor! It is needless to remark that at this time the morale of all troops was exceptional! On 24 August, that never to be forgotten day, after nine days at sea, the Breckenridge steamed slowly into New York Harbor in a steady drizzle which was insufficient to dampen the morale and spirits of all on board!

Upon debarkation the battalion entrained for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey where the men were immediately processed for movement to reception centers nearest their homes, and on 27 August all elements of the battalion departed for their reception stations and 30 days of rest, rehabilitation and recuperation. This period of temporary duty was subsequently increased to 45 days, and on 18th October the initial elements of the unit began arriving at the unit's assembly station at Camp Bowie, Texas. Thus, almost eleven months to the day after its departure, the battalion was again stationed at Camp Bowie.

Although the battalion by this time lost a large percentage of its enlisted personnel, plans were immediately made to resume training. The organization became part of the "Strategic Striking Force," and efforts were made to train administrative personnel prior to receiving fillers for training. By 1 November however with the enlisted strength cut to barely twenty percent of the T/O, the battalion began to suffer cuts in its officer personnel as well. Colonel Weddel as well as all of our field grade officers were relieved from active duty and on 8 November Captain Clarence A. Walker assumed command. A training program was set up and in late November the unit began its first week of a new initial training program. So dramatically had the organizational strength been reduced that it was not unusual to find barely twenty men per company available for training. On 28 November Major John F. Ray was placed on detached

service with the battalion and assumed command. During the third week in December 1945 the battalion received notification that it was on a tentative list of units to be inactivated and on 2 January 1946 received orders that it was to inactivate by 12 January 1946. On 5 January, LT. Colonel Frank N. Sands Jr. assumed command of the battalion and final plans for inactivation were put into operation.

The period of existence of the 1285th Engineer Combat Battalion ended!!!