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Authority VND 735017

By RP NARA Date 6/27/07

S E C R E T

HEADQUARTERS  
FORTY FIFTH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO 45 U S ARMY

.....  
:Auth: CG 45 Div  
:Init: CPA  
:Date: 17 Apr 45  
.....

17 April 1945 ✓

HRA 6404

AG 314.7

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Unit History.

TO : Commanding General, Seventh Army, APO 758, US Army.  
(Attn: Historical Section)

Transmitted herewith Historical Record of the 120th Engineer Battalion, this command, for the month of March 1945.

For the Commanding General:

DISPATCHED  
HQ 45th INF DIV  
APO 45 U S Army  
Date 17 APR 1945  
*Emil Phavta*  
EMIL P NAVTA  
WOJG USA  
Asst Adj Gen

1 Incl:  
Hist Red, 120th Engr Bn (trip)  
w/Supporting Documents



S E C R E T

345-ENG-0,3 Narrative Hist-German Campaigns-120th Engr Bn-45th Inf Div-1-31 Mar 45-1/1/46

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By *RP* NARA Date *6/27/07*NARRATIVE HISTORY OF THE 120TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALIONMARCH 1945

## I. Training Period (March 1-13):

1. The beginning of the month of March found the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion, with the rest of the 45th Infantry Division, in Seventh Army reserve, resting and training in the Luneville-Epinal area of France, having been there since 18 February. A training schedule providing for practice in the assault of fortified positions, as well as firing of weapons, chemical warfare training, etc., was in effect, and engineer work was confined to repair and maintenance of target ranges, and other tasks to facilitate the division's training program. Among these tasks were included the preparation of camouflage suits for the Division Scouting and Patrolling School, the checking of an artillery demonstration area for mines, and the moving of disabled tanks to the anti-tank ranges for use as targets. To accomplish these tasks without unduly interrupting the battalion's training program, a different engineer company was designated as the "work company" for each day, with no training schedule for that day. At the beginning of the month, the training schedule outlined in "Training Memorandum No 5", published 24 February, was still in effect.

2. On 3 March, Major Billups (S-3), as engineer member of a party of three officers from the 45th Division, left to study methods used in breaching the Siegfried Line defenses in the Echternach sector of the Third Army front. In his absence, Captain McCullough (S-2) was designated as acting S-3. Maj Billups returned on 6 March and on 7 March Capt McCullough was sent on a similar mission, as engineer member of a party of five officers, to study river crossing methods in the First and Ninth Army fronts, returning 11 March.

3. Training Memorandum No 6 was published on 3 March, to continue the program outlined in Training Memorandum No 5 which expired on that date. However, the provisions of the new memorandum were never carried out in full because on the morning of 4 March, the engineer battalion found itself suddenly involved in preparations to train the division in river crossings.

4. This new training was carried out in conjunction with the 40th Engineer Combat Group. Each infantry regiment had one full day of training in river crossings with the 40th Engineers acting in their normal role as supporting engineers. This training took place in the area of the Etang De Gondrexange, about 25 kilometers northeast of Luneville, on 11, 12 and 13 March. Previous to the training with the 40th Engineers however, each regiment was given several days preliminary training of the same type, with engineers acting as supporting engineers and as technical advisors. This preliminary training took place at three different locations for each infantry regiment. The 180th Infantry was located on the Meurthe, at St Clement, the 188th Infantry was located at the Meurthe, at St Clement, and the 179th Infantry was on the Moselle, at Pagny-sur-Moselle.

**CLASSIFICATION**  
**CANCELLED**  
**BY AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL**  
**DOWNGRADING COMMITTEE**

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180th Infantry site, there was also constructed a heavy ponton raft, for use in training drivers from Division Artillery, 645th TD Battalion and 191st Tank Battalion. In this training, each engineer lettered company supported its normal infantry regiment. The division scouting and patrolling school at Rambervillers was also continued during this period, adjusting its program to stress amphibious scouting and use of assault boats. The engineers also assisted in the instruction of this school.

5. On the night of 4 March, the special equipment necessary to conduct this training was procured from Seventh Army Engineer in Luneville. This included sufficient material to provide each regimental training site with six (6) storm boats, one light infantry support raft (M/2), two extra half-boats, and a number of six-man and ten-man pneumatic boats. On 5 March, the engineer lettered companies commenced the preparation of the training sites and the training of engineer demonstration teams, and the actual training of the infantry regiments began on 6 and 7 March. The 40th Engineers constructed the heavy ponton raft at the 180th Infantry training site and furnished personnel to assist in the training with it. On the 8th and the 10th of March two additional sites were prepared for training Division Artillery units in stream crossing with DUKS's, one on the Moselle at Roville and the other on the Meurthe at Frambois.

6. In conjunction with this river crossing training, one major engineer task consisted of the building and maintaining of an approach road for the heavy ponton raft site southwest of Luneville. B.R.C. matting and gravel was used here to construct about 400 yards of road. Also during this period, it was intended to train the engineer lettered companies in treadway bridge construction in accordance with Training Memorandum No 6. Brockway trucks and treadway equipment were obtained for this purpose, but the equipment was incomplete, and only one company was able to accomplish any training with it.

7. Beginning 11 March, the infantry regiments partook in one day's training apiece with the 40th Engineers in the Gondrexange area. The 180th Infantry began its training at noon on the 11th, and the 179th on the 12th, and the 157th on the 13th. Each regiment took two officers from its normally supporting engineer company along as observers. Otherwise the divisional engineers took no part in this training. While the regiments were thus engaged, the engineers collected and turned in the training equipment they had been using, and prepared to undertake their next assignment.

## II - Crossing of the Blies River and advance to the Siegfried Line (March 14--17):

As early as 10 March, the 45th Division had been alerted for an early move to the Sarreguemines area, for recommitment in that sector. It was apparent that the first task involved in this new sector would be an assault crossing of the Blies River, so an engineer officer was sent to Frauenberg, northeast of Sarreguemines, to obtain advance data on the river. It was planned for the 157th and 180th



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Infantry Regiments to lead in the attack, so companies "A" and "C" of the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion were attached, respectively, to these regiments for the move to the new area. This attachment, however, was purely administrative, and these companies reverted to battalion control upon arrival of battalion headquarters in the new area. The 180th RCT (Co C attached) moved on 12 March, and the 157th RCT (Co A Attached) moved on 13 March. Co B moved independently on 13 March as well as H&S Co and battalion headquarters and the remainder of the 45th Infantry Division. Upon arrival in the Sarreguemines area, the division came under control of XV Corps.

45th Division Field Order No 1 was published on the 13th, ordering the division to pass through the 44th Infantry Division and breach the Siegfried Line, capture Homburg, and be prepared to continue the advance to the west bank of the Rhine River. For the initial phase of this action, the 157th Infantry was given the right half of the division sector, east of the Blies River, and the 180th Infantry was assigned the left half, with a jump-off line on the Blies River from its bend at Bliesbrück, to a point two kilometers west of Frauenberg. 120th Engineer Battalion Field Order No 1 was published the following day, assigning Co "A" to the support of the 157th Infantry, and initially both "B" and "C" Companies to the support of the 180th Infantry Regiment. Co "B" would cross the 3rd battalion of the 180th Infantry over the Blies River at Frauenberg, and Co "C" would cross the 1st battalion at Blies-Ebersing. Once the crossing had been made, Co "C" would take over the entire support of the 180th Infantry, and Co "B" would revert to general support. The 179th Infantry regiment was being held in division reserve, and Co "B" was to be prepared to move with them to exploit a possible breakthrough. The 1277th Engr C Bn, part of the 1101st Engr C Group, was in support of the 45th Infantry Division. Captain Johnston and three enlisted men from the 1277th Engr C Bn stayed with battalion headquarters throughout the operation for liason purposes.

The jump-off was scheduled for 0100A hours 15 March, but considerable preparatory engineer work had to be performed before that hour. During the night of 13--14 March, reconnaissance was conducted at both of the 180th Infantry crossing points for suitable footbridge and ferry sites, assault boats were brought forward to Frauenberg and Blies-Ebersing, and lanes to the river were cleared of mines. As the 44th Infantry Division was still not relieved by the 45th, the 63rd Engr C Bn (44th Div) assisted in this mine clearing, and also cleared the debris from the roadway at the demolished railroad overpass south of Blies-Ebersing. On the night of 14--15 March, before the attack began, footbridge and rafting equipment was also brought forward, and additional mine clearing was performed on the near bank of the river. The 1277th Engineer C Bn were prepared to install a Bailey bridge over the Blies River at Frauenberg as soon as the tactical situation permitted.

The attack began as scheduled, promptly at 0100A hours, 15 March. The 3rd Infantry Division attacked on the right of the 45th and XXI Corps on the left. Initially, the 157th Infantry, in the



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right half of the 45th division sector, made slow progress because of well prepared enemy positions and extensive minefields. Once this initial resistance was broken however, a steady advance was made until the regiment reached the main Siegfried Line positions about 5 kilometers southwest of Zweibrucken on 17 March. The town of Bliesbruck astride the river at its bend between the 157th and 180th Infantry sectors held out stubbornly, and on the afternoon of the 15th, the 1st battalion of the 179th Infantry was committed to attack the town from the northwest. Though completely bypassed, the town was not entirely cleared until the afternoon of the 16th. The crossing of the Blies River proceeded smoothly for the 180th Infantry, with relatively light opposition, and initial objectives were quickly reached.

The major engineer task during this operation was the crossing of the 180th Infantry over the Blies River. Co C, crossing the 1st battalion at Blies-Ebersing, encountered no difficulties. By 0235, all four companies of the infantry had been crossed in assault boats, by 0250 two footbridges had been completed, and during the next day, a ferry for crossing light vehicles was built and then immediately converted into an assault bridge. This bridge was completed by 1830A hours. It was also necessary to lay about 200 yards of Sommerfeld matting on the north shore at this bridge site to connect the bridge with an existing trail. Co B, crossing the 3rd battalion at Frauenberg, encountered more difficulty in their operation. A Bailey bridge which had previously been built and subsequently demolished at this site was kept under observation by the enemy, alert to the possibility of an attempted crossing at that point. Assault troops were crossed on the debris of this bridge and over the spillway of a dam on the upstream side, and though there was still small arms fire on the bridge site, a footbridge was begun about an hour later. The stream at this point was 125 feet wide, and a swift current in mid-stream caused considerable difficulty. During the construction of this bridge, one EM was killed by enemy mortar fire, and shortly after its completion, a portion of the bridge was demolished by a direct artillery hit. After four more unsuccessful attempts to built this bridge, assault boats were resorted to, but this too had to be abandoned when the first two were sunk. Meanwhile, a second footbridge was attempted, but a bazooka round severed the main cable on the first attempt, and on the second try the center section was knocked out by floating debris. The use of assault boats here also failed. The first footbridge was again attempted at 0445, and was finally secured by 0530, permitting the remainder of the infantry battalion to cross and secure a bridgehead by daylight. In addition to the one EM killed engineer casualties included three EM wounded in action.

In all portions of the division sector, numerous mines were encountered. These consisted mainly of Schu mines (mostly laid on top of the ground) and Holz mines, as well as some S mines and Teller mines. Consequently, all roads to be used had to be carefully swept for mines as the attack progressed, from the jump-off to the Siegfried Line.

During the day of the 15th, the 1277 Engrs, in support of the 45th Division, removed the wreckage of the demolished Bailey bridge at Frauenberg and constructed a new Bailey bridge on the same site. This bridge was opened for traffic at 1915A.



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On the morning of 16 March, the 179th Infantry Regiment was committed between the 157th and 180th Infantry, astride the Blies River. Operations Instructions No 9 was published to place Co B 120th Engineer Battalion in direct support of the 179th.

Between the jump-off line and the Siegfried Line positions, numerous road blocks, craters, blown bridges were encountered. As the advance progressed, it became necessary to obtain a later crossing over the Blies River which split the division sector up in the center. This problem was solved when it was found that the bridge at Herbitzheim was only partly damaged, and was repaired with new decking to a class 30 bridge by the 1277th Engineers. On the east side of the Blies River, Co A installed a treadway bridge at Niedergailbach, and Co B re-decked a small bridge at Bliesbruck and installed a treadway bridge on a side stream at Gersheim. On the west side of the Blies River, Co C installed culverts at Emlingen and Assweiler, as well as filling several craters.

On 17 March, advance elements of the 45th Division reached the Siegfried Line positions, from Niederwurzbach on the left to Wattweiler on the right, and preparations were made for its assault.

III - BREACHING OF THE SIEGFRIED LINE AND PURSUIT TO THE RHINE  
March 18--25).

In the 45th Division zone of advance, the Siegfried Line positions ran generally in an east-west line, from Niederwurzbach on the left, along the south side of the Wurzbach stream, then to Bliescastel and Webenheim in the center of the sector, then east to the vicinity just north of Wattweiler, southwest to the vicinity of Zweibrucken. These positions were first reached by our troops on 17 March, as they were also by the 3rd division on our right and the 63rd division on our left, and operations to breach the line began on the 18th.

The main engineer tasks performed in this operation were the breaching of the "dragon's teeth", crossing of anti-tank ditches, crossing the Wurzbach stream, demolition of pillboxes once they were taken, and clearing of obstacles in the towns as they were cleared by the infantry.

At noon on 18 March, the 157th Infantry began a frontal assault on the Siegfried Line on a two battalion front, with tanks and TDS in support, and Co A, 120th Engineer Battalion, giving engineer support. In this sector, it was necessary to breach a row of "dragon's teeth" and cross two anti-tank ditches, 30 feet across and filled with water, before the 100 yards apart main pillboxes could be reached. The "dragon's teeth" were demolished first by using a C2 pack on each tooth in the gap to be blown, then leveling off the remnants of reinforcing steel after the explosion with a tank dozer. The tank dozer was then used to push sufficient fill into the anti-tank ditches to allow tanks to cross.



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Working similarly with the 179th and 180th Infantry regiments Companies B and C respectively assisted the infantry in breaching the Siegfried Line. The line cracked on 20 March and division drove rapidly to Homburg. At Homburg the division was pinched out by elements of the Third Army and contact with the enemy was lost.

On 22 March, the Battalion CP moved to Eisenberg. On 24 March the Battalion CP moved to Westhofen where final plans and preparations for the crossing of the Rhine River were made.

IV - THE CROSSING OF THE RHINE RIVER (see attached Special Report on Crossing of the Rhine River).

V - THE FIRST CROSSING OF THE MAIN RIVER.

The movement of the 45th Infantry Division from the Rhine to the Main River was completed in two days, 27-28 March, against only scattered resistance from disorganized groups of enemy personnel. Little or no engineer work was necessary during this phase as the rapidly retreating enemy did not attempt to blow bridges and culverts and no mines were laid. Trucks from the lettered companies were used to assist the motorized infantry forward. During this period, the Battalion CP moved to the vicinity of Gr. Ostheim, about 5 miles SW of Aschaffenberg.

An armored column of the Third Army had reached the Main River just ahead of the division and had secured a railroad bridge intact near Schweinheim. Upon reaching the river with the 157th Infantry on 28 March, Company A took over the maintenance and security of this bridge for vehicular traffic. The 157th Infantry and elements of the 179th Infantry crossed over on this bridge; the 157th Infantry attacking the city of Aschaffenberg, the 179th Infantry attacking to the southeast. Company B repaired a damaged German ferry near Niedernberg and had it ready for operation on 30 March when it was decided to construct an M-2 floating treadway bridge at this site. The 1101st Engineer Group then constructed a 300 foot, M-2, floating treadway at this site. Construction was completed at 0315, 31 March. Co C supported the 180th Infantry in this operation and made good use of their attached tank dozer in clearing road blocks in the vicinity of Kl Wallstadt under machine gun and 20mm fire.

The assault elements of the 179th and 180th Infantry regiments crossed over the Main River in DUKWs; the remainder of the regiments and vehicles crossed over on the floating treadway at Niedernberg during the day of 31 March.

The close of the period found the 45th Division pushing northeast from Aschaffenberg. The 157th Infantry was still engaged in cleaning out the last of the fanatical troops who were stubbornly defending the city. Company A, in close support of the 157th Infantry was engaged in cleaning a route through the city. Companies B and C were supporting the advance of the 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments by clearing road blocks and minor demolitions.



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Roads swept for mines	Miles	128½
Roads improved	"	16
Mines Anti-Tank	each	
<u>Removed</u>		
Teller	15	
Holz	22	
US M1A1	120	
US T6E1	26	
<u>Destroyed</u>		
Holzmines	18	
Mines Anti Personnel		
<u>Removed</u>		
Schu	85	
Improvised 75mm shell mines	34	
Road Blocks removed	each	63
Road craters filled	each	39
Cratering charges removed	each	1
Anti-Tank ditch crossings filled	each	7
Pill boxes destroyed	each	9
Dragons Teeth gaps breached	each	5
Asparagus bed (obstacle) demolished	each	2
Anti-tank obstacles (type unspecified) breached	each	5
Casualties		
KIA - 1 EM		
(Also 1 EM killed by stray bullet from Infantry Pill box assault area.)		
WIA - 17 EM      1 Officer		
Footbridges constructed	each	4
Infantry support rafts built	each	1
Infantry support bridge built	each	1
Treadway bridges built	each	3
Culverts installed	each	3
Culverts repaired	each	3
Civilian ferry rebuilt and operated		1
Stream crossing ladders (30 ft) built	each	4
Signs painted	each	667
Water supplied to divisional troops	gals.	816,390

VII - Administrative Activities:

I - STRENGTH	OFFICERS	WO	EM	TOTAL
a. KIA	0	0	1	1
b. Died	0	0	1	1
c. WIA (hospital)	0	0	8	8
d. LIA (hospital)	0	0	2	2
e. Hospital (non-BC)	2	0	44	46
f. Transfers (inf OCS)	0	0	2	2
g. <u>Evacuations:</u>				
(1) BC	0	0	10	10
(2) Non BC	2	0	28	30
h. RTU (fr evac and non-evac)				
(1) BC	0	0	2	2
(2) Fr evac	1	0	21	22
(3) Fr non evac	0	0	26	26
i. <u>Reinforcements:</u>	0	0	0	0

j. One (1) officer and fourteen (14) EM were wounded in action and not hospitalized during the month, in addition to the ten (1) hospitalized BCs.

k. The net losses of personnel in the battalion during the month was One (1) officer and nineteen (19) enlisted men.

l. Average of officers present for duty during the month: 31.

m. Average of EM present for duty daily during the month: 627.

II - TD - US:	Officers	EM	Total
		2	2

III - COURT MARTIALS

a. Number of EM in arrest	-	4
b. Number of EM in Conf (includes a above and confinements prior to Feb)		5
c. Number of EM tried		8
(1) Summary	-	4
(2) Special	-	1
(3) General	-	3

IV - AWARDS AND DECORATIONS	Officers	EM	Total
a. <u>Recommended:</u>			
(OLC to the Silver Star)	2	0	2
Silver Star	1	3	4
Bronze Star	1	5	6



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	<u>Off</u>	<u>EM</u>	<u>Total</u>
b. Approved and awarded by Div	0	0	0
c. Presented at Ceremony	0	0	0

V - GENERAL HEALTH OF BATTALION:

- a. Scabies - - - - - 2
- b. Venereal Disease- - - - - 0
- c. Athlete Foot - - - - - 3
- d. The percentage of military personnel currently requiring immunization for the month: None.
- e. Undue prevalence of acute communicable disease: None
- f. There were no surgical infections within this command.
- g. There were no cases of acute psychoneurosis or other mental abnormalities.
- h. As a whole the general health of the battalion during the month of March was: very good.

VI - SPECIAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES:

- a. PX rations issued - twice during the month.
- b. Issue of special service items: None.
- c. Number of shows or other entertainments:
  - 1. Movies:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>NO. SHOWS</u>	<u>ATTENDANCE</u>	<u>CROWD REACTION</u>
3 March	"Animal Kingdom"	1	300	Very good

2. Live Shows: None

d. Rest Camps:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>WO</u>	<u>EM</u>
Paris	1	1	15
England	0	0	6
Brussels	1	0	6
Nancy	1	0	12
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>39</b>

VI - I & E FUNCTIONS FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH:

- 1. Lt Porter, the IE Officer for the battalion, informed all officers in the battalion as to the policies of Phase I & II Educational Program. Officers then carried this to the men.
- 2. Group discussions were organized and each company held them; One hour per week, when possible.
- 3. Educational survey was taken of the battalion.
- 4. Prospective teacher were listed from the survey and from the WDAGO Forms #20 of the EM
- 5. Normal distribution of I & E material:
  - (a) Stars and Stripes
  - (b) Yank Magazine
  - (c) 45th Sig Co news
  - (d) 45th Div news
  - (e) Newsmaps
  - (f) Army talk pamphlets.



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For the Battalion Commander:

JOSEPH W LOWE, JR  
Major, CE,  
Executive Officer

OFFICIAL:

*John H. Dismant*  
JOHN H DISMANT  
1st Lt CE  
Adjutant

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ROSTER OF OFFICERS  
120TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION  
31 MARCH 1945

BATTALION HEADQUARTERS:

Charles S Monnier	Lt Col.	0353106	CO
Joseph W Lowe Jr	Major	0293270	Ex 0
Benjamin E Billups	Major	0403916	S-3
Hugh T McCullough Jr	Captain	0422440	S-2
Arthur Tauscher	Captain	0460191	ADE
William M Hales	Captain	0405742	S-4
John H Dismant	1st Lt	0374920	S-1
Frank F Porter	1st Lt	01107053	Asst S-2
Roy C Smith	1st Lt	01100342	Ren 0
John M Burger	1st Lt	01109165	SD-Div Hq
William C Picket	1st Lt	01105740	TD-US
Arllis D Foster	2nd Lt	01692568	Asst S-3

HEADQUARTERS & SERVICE COMPANY:

Elmer S Pickett	Captain	01100733	CO
Ivan F Sandridge	1st Lt	01105784	Bn Motor Off
Jim M Flanagan	CWO	W2117855	Asst Bn Motor O
George A Ferguson	WOJG	W2118645	Asst S-4
Charles P Rusher	WOJG	W2108256	Pers Off

MEDICAL DETACHMENT:

Aubrey E Stowers	Captain	0375220	Surgeon
Milton Wasserman	Captain	0481477	Dental Surgeon

COMPANY "A":

James H Rickey Jr	Captain	0469860	CO
Robert C Boedecker	2nd Lt	01117080	1st Plat Comdr
Walter E Oleson	1st Lt	01106374	2nd Plat Comdr
William W Etherton	1st Lt	01107937	3rd Plat Comdr
Frank W Peak	2nd Lt	0543107	Co Adm O

COMPANY "B":

Wayne W Bridges	Captain	01112045	CO
Harry H Fields	1st Lt	01107411	1st Plat Comdr
David J Dayton	1st Lt	0543901	2nd Plat Comdr
Ray F Boedecker	2nd Lt	01117079	3rd Plat Comdr
Howard M Cohen	1st Lt	01112623	Co Adm O
John L Larzalere	2nd Lt	01109440	DS-7th Army SS

COMPANY "C":

Alvin F Frank	Captain	0461128	CO
Sidney L Simmons	1st Lt	01112974	1st Plat Comdr
Marvin S Prestwood	1st Lt	0540201	2nd Plat Comdr
Richard O Westphal	2nd Lt	01103461	3rd Plat Comdr

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By *RP* NARA Date *6/27/07*HEADQUARTERS 120TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION  
APO 45, U S ARMY

1 April 1945

I - BATTLE CASUALTIES FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 1945:(1) KILLED IN ACTIONDATE

Tec 5 Acey C Glover, 34601384, Company "B" - 15 March 45

(2) LIGHTLY WOUNDED IN ACTION:

Sgt Adam E Feachen, 35279367, Company "B" - 15 March 45  
 Pvt Billie R Conley, 20842066, Company "B" - 15 March 45  
 Tec 5 Francis J Brennan, 37421021, Med Det - 18 March 45  
 Pfc Joseph M Casmer, 33057245, Company "A" - 18 March 45  
 Pvt Lytton J Oille, 15099987, Company "A" - 25 Mar 45  
 Cpl Clemente Gallegos, 20841857, Company "C" - 26 March 45  
 Pfc Peter Badje, 37048588, Company "C" - 26 March 45  
 Pfc Woodrow W Smouse, 38010182, Company "C" - 29 March 45

(3) LIGHTLY INJURED IN ACTION:

Pvt James R Miller, 14018728, Company "C" - 16 March 45  
 Pfc Raymond Meador, 38010182, Company "C" - 23 March 45

II - BATTLE CASUALTIES RETURNED TO DUTY DURING MARCH 1945:

Pvt Joseph W Rollo, 32962299, Company "B" - 2 March 45  
 Tec 5 Joe C Dugger, 20841471, Company "C" - 5 March 45

For the Battalion Commander:

*John H. Dismant*  
 JOHN H DISMANT  
 1st Lt CE  
 Adjutant.



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## HEADQUARTERS 120TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

APO #45, U S Army  
14 April 1945SPECIAL REPORT ON RHINE RIVER CROSSING 45TH INFANTRY  
DIVISION 25-26-27 MARCH 19451. Training and Initial Planning Phase:

a. On 18 February 1945, the 45th Infantry Division was pulled out of the line in the vicinity of La Petite Pierre, Alsace, after 87 days of combat and moved to a rest and training area in the Luneville-Rambervillers area. At this time, the division reverted from VI Corps to 7th Army control. The objective of this rest and training period was to prepare the division for an early re-entry into combat. Emphasis was placed on weapons training, basic marksmanship and small unit firing problems which later graduated into problems involving the assault of fortified positions in preparation for a probable assault on the Siegfried Line.

On 3 March 1945, the 45th Infantry Division was ordered to commence intensive river crossing training in preparation for an assault crossing of the Rhine River. The 40th Engineer Group was given the responsibility of training with the division for the proposed operation, with the understanding that this group would also be responsible for the crossing in the actual operation. An immediate conference was held with members of the Division Command group, the Division Engineer, CO 40th Engineer Group, Division Artillery Commander and representatives from each of the three infantry regiments being present. At this conference the following principles were agreed upon:

(1) The 120th Engineer Battalion would be responsible for the basic training of all elements of the division in use of assault boats, storm boats and rubber boats, organization of carrying parties and boat teams and use of light and heavy rafts. In the actual operation the Division Engineers would be responsible for normal engineer support to the friendly bank of the Rhine, would be crossed by the 40th Engineer Group in the same manner as the other Divisional troops, and would take up normal engineer support of the division again upon the far shore.

(2) The 40th Engineer Group would be responsible for the tactical training of each RCT in the division under conditions which would approximate the actual proposed crossing of the Rhine River. In the actual operation, this Group would be responsible for the crossing of all elements of the division from the initial assault crossing phase to include the final bridging phase.



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b. During the period 5 March to 12 March, the training proceeded rapidly according to plan. The 120th Engineer Combat Battalion selected three sites along the Moselle and Muerthe Rivers and conducted basic boat training for each of the three infantry regiments at these sites. The 40th Engineer Group selected a site along the Rhine-Rhone Canal north of Luneville, assembled all necessary equipment and commenced training in preparation for the proposed RCT problems. These problems were successfully conducted on 10, 11, 12 March 1945.

## 2. Intermediate Tactical Phase:

a. On 13 March 1945, the 45th Infantry Division moved to the vicinity of Sarreguemines, France in preparation for re-entry into combat. Preparations were made to jump off through the 44th Infantry Division through an assault crossing of the Blies River and for the assault of the Siegfried Line. The division was now under control of XV Corps and the 1101st Engr Group was placed in support of the division.

The division crossed the stubbornly defended Blies River during the night of 14-15 March and pushed in to the Siegfried Line. By 21 March, the division had successfully breached the line and had reached Homburg. At this point elements of the Third Army had cut across the division zone of advance and the division was out of contact with the enemy. The CO 40th Engr Group made contact with the division on 23 March and plans were made for the immediate movement of the Group to assembly areas in preparation for the Rhine crossing.

On 24 March the division moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Westhofen, Germany, eight kilometers west of the Rhine River and about ten kilometers northwest of Worms, in preparation for the crossing.

## 3. Final Planning Phase:

a. During the interval between the completion of the training phase on 12 March and the arrival of the 40th Engr Group in their final assembly areas, the CO of the 40th Engr Group had prepared a detailed plan of operations, in the form of an engineer field order, which was sufficiently elastic to cover any normal section of the River that might be assigned to the 45th Infantry Division. This plan was then amended to fit the actual division sector north of Worms.

During the morning of 25 March, the entire group of artillery liaison planes at division's disposal, was made available for river reconnaissance purposes. Much valuable information concerning the river and terrain and enemy disposition on the far shore was gained first hand by engineer and infantry commanders and staffs through the use of these planes. Intensive reconnaissance was conducted along the near bank of the river by engineer foot patrols both in daylight and under cover of darkness during the days 23-24 March.



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The division planned to cross the Rhine River with two regiments abreast; the 179th Infantry Regiment (reinforced) on the left; the 180th Infantry Regiment (reinforced) on the right. The 157th Infantry Regiment at this time was outposting the river in the division sector, and upon being passed through by the assault regiments would revert to division reserve and be prepared to cross in support of the attack. Companies B and C, 120th Engineer Combat Battalion were attached to the 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments, respectively, for the crossing; attachments to terminate on arrival of the Hq 120th Engineer Combat Bn upon the far shore. Co A, 120th Engr Combat Bn was placed in general support, prepared to support the movement of the 157th Infantry Regiment.

Working in close conjunction, the Division Engineer, G-3, G-4, CO 40th Engineer Group, and CO 1101st Engr Group, prepared final plans and made final preparations for the crossing. Sites were selected for two class 40 bridges; one, an M-2 floating treadway to be constructed by the 1101st Engr Group at Hamm, the other, a heavy ponton bridge to be constructed south of Rhein Durkheim by the 40th Engineer Group. Sites were also selected for two infantry assault rafts, one heavy ponton ferry and one DUKW ferry in each assault regiment's sector, these crossings to be constructed by the 40th Engineer Group. Final assembly areas for troops, combat vehicles, DUKWs and bridging equipment were selected and marked. A traffic control plan was drawn up and all roads to be controlled by this plan were carefully marked. A system of traffic control posts was set up and illuminated signs were improvised for control of traffic during the hours of darkness. These signs proved invaluable during the course of the operation.

#### 4. The Crossing Phase:

a. The assault battalions of the 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments began the crossing by storm boats on D-Day, 26 March 1945, at H-Hour 0200. The initial waves were successfully crossed. Casualties were moderate and were somewhat less than had been expected. Expected enemy artillery concentrations did not materialize; however considerable harassing fire from German flak-wagons on the opposite bank was received. By daylight of 26 March, both regiments were across the river and the bulk of their supporting light artillery had crossed on DUKWs. A heavy ponton ferry was in operation at 0700 hours and five DD tanks had crossed in the 180th Infantry sector by 0800 hours.

In the 179th Infantry sector two light infantry support rafts were placed in operation by 0800 hours. By 1000 hours, 26 March the infantry had advanced rapidly inland and all enemy fire had been cleared from the bridge sites. The 1101st Engineer Group commenced construction of an M-2 floating treadway bridge at Hamm at 1050 hours. The 40th Engineer Group started work on a heavy ponton bridge south of Rhein Durkheim at 1000 hours. The heavy ponton ferry in the 179th Infantry sector was placed in operation at 1345 hours.



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Work proceeded on the two bridges throughout the day and night of 26-27 March without interruption and both were successfully completed by 0530 hours 27 March.

During the daylight hours of 27 March 1945, the remainder of the 45th Division and supporting troops crossed the Rhine River on the two bridges and by nightfall was consolidated on the far side of the river and prepared to continue the advance.

#### 5. Problems encountered:

a. Technical problems encountered by the supporting engineer troops, the 40th Engineer Group and the 1101st Engineer Group, in the construction of bridges and in the operation of boats and ferries are not covered in this report since these problems will be more adequately covered in reports that the organizations concerned have doubtlessly prepared. In this connection it may be said that the support rendered and the results obtained by the 40th Engineer Group and the 1101st Engineer Group in this operation merits high praise.

Traffic control presented a difficult, but not unusual problem in this operation. In order to keep traffic from becoming jammed, on access roads to the crossing sites, initially for engineer construction traffic, then later for both tactical and engineer traffic, and to insure that the right people got to the right place at the right time, a carefully planned system of traffic control was necessary. Working in close coordination, the division engineer, G-4, G-3, the Provost Marshal, and the Commanding Officers of the two Engineer Groups devised a plan for traffic control involving the use of two traffic control posts, one-way approach routes and return routes from the various crossing sites, adequate telephone communication between the traffic control points, crossing sites and troop and vehicle assembly areas. Each traffic control post was jointly occupied and operated by officer representatives from G-3, and G-4 and all routes were plentifully marked with signs. Illuminated signs were used during the hours of darkness. Strict disciplinary control was maintained by the division MPs. This traffic control worked very well and no serious traffic tie-ups occurred during the period that the 45th Division retained control of the crossing sites.

In general, problems actually encountered in the operation were of much lesser magnitude than had been anticipated. Enemy resistance was not as determined as had been anticipated; very few mines were found on the far shore; and the river did not present a formidable barrier as had been expected. Due to excellent planning on the part of the supporting engineers and the smooth coordination between the division elements, the division engineers and the supporting engineer groups, the operation became, in the words of the infantry: "just another damn river".

For the Division ENGINEER

JOSEPH W LOWE, JR  
Major, CE, 120th Engr C Bn  
Executive Officer

1 - Incl:

Annex #2, to FO #2, Hq 45 Inf Div 25 Mar 45 "ENGINEER PLAN"



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OFFICIAL:

*C. S. Monnier*

C. S. MONNIER  
Lt Col CE, 120th Engr C Bn  
Commanding

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