

SECRET

HISTORY of OPERATIONS

142^d ENGR. BN.

APRIL 1945

L-1052

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(master)

SECRET

Unit History - 1 Apr - 30 Apr 45
142d Engineer Combat Battalion

NARRATIVE

The Battalion had barely crossed the Rhine when the push started again. The Headquarters was set up at Klein-huebach Germany. Here at Klein-huebach the Corps Engineers put a steel treadway bridge across the Main River. This bridge supported the crossing of the 232d Combat Team including Company B of the 142d Engineers. With the division converging on Wertheim from the north and west and south the 232d would have had to recross the Main River to hit Wertheim. Air attacks on the only escape route, the vulnerable bridge at Klein-huebach, indicated that perhaps the 232d might be trapped but with the subsequent capture of Wertheim the Engineers were able to put a steel treadway bridge in ahead of the 232d and let them advance east. On 1 Apr 45 the Recon Section was sent to reconnoiter roads from Klein-huebach to Wertheim for MSF. Wertheim was said to have been cleared by the Infantry the night before. S/Sgt Edward Fiebeling and T-5 Lyle Givan and section chief S/Sgt A.J. Foyt undertook the job. They drove without incident to the outskirts of Wertheim classifying the roads and bridges as they went along. Upon entering the town one man remarked that he had not seen any American troops or white flags on the buildings for the past few miles. Suddenly as they rounded a corner in town they spotted the enemy about 15 strong. As the jeep came to a sudden halt the enemy scattered, two ran down a hill to the left of the road, three ran into a tunnel in the wall on the right but one, a Captain, was trapped between the jeep and the wall. As the two who ran down the hill jumped behind trees leveled on the occupants of the jeep, Sgt Fiebeling raised his rifle and fired wounding one of the two. With this the other surrendered and those in the tunnel came out and did likewise. Before many minutes nine prisoners including a Captain, were rounded up and marched out of the town. It was some 20 Kilometers back before the men met the infantry who informed them that they were just preparing to attack that town.

By the time the Battalion arrived in Wertheim the following day, the town had been cleared and the Infantry was pushing on toward Wurzburg. The 222d was the spearhead with Company A, this Battalion attached.

After stiff fighting the section of the city on the west bank of the river was cleared. The assault crossing was tough--probably the toughest assignment the Engineers ever had. The crossing site was located in the center of the town and the Germans had gun positions in the buildings along the east bank and one machine gun nest in the ruins under the arch of the bridge nearby. To A Company fell the task of getting the Infantry across. Infantry Commanders ordered a forced crossing by assault boats. No smoke was made available yet the Engineers brought up their crews and assault boats and began the assault crossing. All that day the Engineers carried the Infantry across under heavy mortar fire and crossfire of enemy machine guns. The fire of the machine-gunner under the ruined bridge was particularly deadly for he could not be fired at from outside of the river. The fearlessness, skill and courage of the Engineers was proven in this crossing but not without a cost. It was here that Company Commander of A Co. Capt George M. Fullmore was wounded together with six enlisted men. Two men were killed in action and a third missing.

Two assault boats were lost in the operation.

In the meantime the other two companies were moving to Murburg to begin clearing the streets of rubble to allow passage of the infantry. Company C erected a steel trestleway pontoon bridge under cover of smoke, making further use of assault boats unnecessary.

But the Germans were determined to make Murburg as costly as possible. During the night they infiltrated and by morning the infantry had to begin clearing the east side of the river again. Enemy mortar fire was particularly heavy at the bridge site but the bridge was not hit.

In the early hours of 5 April 45 the entire Battalion was alerted for possible enemy counter attack. Company C was sent to guard the pontoon trestleway bridge and Company B was withdrawn across the river to support them. The night passed without incident but the Battalion was still alerted. By the end of the day Corps had a Bailey bridge thrown across the gap in the concrete bridge and men and materials flowed across the Main in ever increasing numbers.

By this time the east side of city was in shambles and the Engineers were busy clearing the debris. Tunnels were cleared, craters filled and a number of enemy anti-aircraft weapons were destroyed. Finally the steel trestleway bridge was taken up and the Battalion moved forward.

The attack then swung north east towards Schweinfurt. All through the advance the Main River and its tributaries had to be crossed and recrossed as the river wound its way through the hills. From 7 April to 9 April 45 Company A built and operated an assault boat ferry continuing in operation until the completion of the trestleway bridge. Capt Jackson, Commanding Officer of Company C was hit by machine gun fire and evacuated in the drive out of Murburg. Lt Layzer assumed command of Company C.

The castle on the west bank of the river in Murburg had a huge painted sign on one of the vertical walls reading "Heil Hitler". Company C painted this out and replaced it with a sign eight feet high and two hundred forty feet long reading "42d Infantry (Rainbow) Division" with colored Rainbows at either end.

As the drive toward Schweinfurt progressed the main job of the Engineers was reconnoitering and repairing roads, sweeping them for mines, and clearing abatis. It was while reconnoitering the road north-east from Obbach that Lt Fries, CO of Company B and two EM were injured and the driver of the vehicle killed when their jeep hit an enemy anti-tank mine. The road was quickly swept for more mines and Lt Benjamin Perone continued on the mission.

But not all the Engineers work was maintaining roads and bridges. On 11 April 45 two enemy mined aerial bombs were removed from under a bridge near Everbach. One detail was sent to destroy enemy guns in the vicinity of Geldersheim while others were detailed to guard loaded enemy railroad cars near Fergolshausen.

The attack on Schweinfurt was preceded by a four hour bombardment by medium bombers in the middle of the day. This softening up was quite effective. This was evidenced by the amount of tank dozer and bulldozer work needed in clearing. With the fall of Schweinfurt, the main job again became clearing and maintaining supply roads for the Infantry. For three days, following the fall of the city, men and bulldozers were busy clearing the streets of debris and wreckage. Company C again did the honors at Schweinfurt by painting two huge rainbows on two towers in the town. The S-4 section had to dig deep for paint, but the paint was supplied and the rainbows still advertise the victors.

Then the drive swung southward again pointed toward Furth-Munberg with the 142d Engineers in close support of the Infantry. Company A constructed one twenty foot span timber trestle bridge at Dachsbech. Civilians were used to help clean 150 yards of abatis and road blocks. One platoon constructed approaches for Bailey bridge at Gutenstetten which the 11th Engineers erected.

On 17 April Company B, in support of 232d Infantry cleared the road SE of Cadolzburg to enable the 2d Battalion to move forward. On its return trip to the Company bivouac area it was attacked by enemy planes but no damage was suffered. One squad was sent to Leichendorf, to remove a 250 lb explosive from a bridge. Although subject to Artillery and small arms fire the mission was accomplished. The bridge was strengthened to carry medium tanks which enabled the regiment to maneuver and gave them an escape route via Ammerndorf.

Meanwhile the Infantry was having difficulty crossing the river at Vach. The bridge had been blown and presented a formidable road block. While foot troops forded the stream on the mill dam, 2d platoon of Company A began working on the bridge. The Germans did a poor job of demolitions for the bridge dropped straight down into the stream. By cutting down the abutments and building up the approaches the Engineers were able to utilize the steel truss bridge itself.

The next day found the Infantry again pinned down by sniper and machine gun fire within Furth. First Battalion 222d Infantry was unable to cross the river due to heavy enemy fire and a blown bridge. Lt Elliott and members of the first platoon attempted to reconnoiter the bridge but were driven back by the intense sniper and machine gun fire forcing them to abandon their jeep. A number of attempts were made to recover the vehicle but to no avail. Finally under protection of the Tank Destroyers, S/Sgt Hoyt of the reconnaissance section was able to extricate the vehicle. By noon the enemy was pinned down long enough to allow the engineers to remove prepared charges from the parts of the bridge not yet blown, and locate a bridge suitable for foot troops. One truck of Company A suffered a direct hit from Artillery killing two Engineers and knocking out the truck, all the squad tools, and equipment. With foot troops securing the opposite bank of the stream, the Engineers soon had a vehicular bridge built.

The 242d Infantry was having similar difficulty in entering Furth from the southeast. Most of the bridges over the numerous streams along the route were blown. Near Zirndorf a three span class 40 timber trestle bridge was repaired by Company C. At Ammerndorf a 30 ft timber bridge and a corduroy and plank bypass was constructed. By 20 April Furth was secured and little was left for

the Engineers to do except clear the streets and destroy captured enemy equipment.

Without letup the drive for the Danube with the ultimate objective of Munich was begun. At various times during the drive separate platoons were detached from the Engineers to assist Task Force Target, 42d Pan and the 20th Armored Division.

On 21 April Company B was alerted for attack in this new direction. The Company was ordered into support of Leading Battalion as a screen for the Infantry Regiment. Its primary mission was to send back road and bridge information to the regiment. Vehicles of the Company carried Engineers and personnel of Company A, 232d Infantry as advanced motorized Battalion. At Wasser-Mungenau the advance was temporarily stopped until a Bailey bridge could be brought forward to cross the river there.

By 0850 22 April the Bailey Bridge was completed and the company continued on its mission. The Tank dozer knocked out road blocks along the way while the Engineers filled in craters as they went.

All the next day the Engineers were busy putting in culverts and building by passes. At Unter-Asbach Lt Tuccillo and volunteers removed 4000 lbs of demolitions from two bridges. Two squads maintained a crater bypass operating a wench truck and dozer to enable supporting artillery and other vehicles to pass.

In the meantime 242d Infantry was maintaining the same pace in their parallel drive. Company C worked thirty-six hours straight filling craters, building culverts and bridges, and clearing underpasses to keep the drive rolling forward to Donaworth and the Danube.

At Buchdorf just short of the Danube three anti-tank mines wrecked three vehicles one of the being Lt Bottcher's S-1 3/4 ton vehicle. Lt Bottcher and his driver were evacuated. Further along the road the 20th Armored Division lost one tank and jeep from enemy mines. At 0300 on the morning of 27 April the troops were brought up to cross the Danube near Altesheim. The river was high and swift, making the Engineers tasks difficult. By 0800 two companies of Infantry had been taken across in assault boats. Three attempts were made by Corps Engineers to put up pontoon foot bridges but each time the swift current washed them away.

Attempts were made to take vehicles across on an assault boat raft but the current made it uncontrollable and it capsized submerging a 2 1/2 ton truck and a jeep. But these failures only drove the Engineers on harder. By mid morning, through intermittent enemy mortar fire, with the aid of the 57th Engineers they had a heavy pontoon raft in operation enabling heavy equipment to be taken across. By 1500 a steel treadway bridge was in operation in addition to the raft.

In the meantime the Infantry was held up at the Lech River. Lt Persons and first platoon Company F was given the mission of crossing 232d Infantry over the Lech just south of its junction with the Danube. An eight span steel truss bridge had been blown beyond vehicular repair. After a careful reconnaissance it was decided that because of the swift current, assault crossing obstacles and enemy machine gun fire the blown bridge would be repaired to form a foot bridge. A reconnaissance group of the platoon leader and of enlisted men went forward to measure the water gap. A German machine gun immediately opened up pinning the party down and wounding two men. Supporting fire from the other Engineers and Infantrymen enabled the party to reach safety. Sgt Kelly and Cpl Parks went forward under heavy machine gun fire to pull the two wounded men to safety. Despite the enemy fire the bridge was completed by 2330 and the entire regiment crossed safely.

Later a trestle bridge was constructed near the blown bridge but the construction of this foot bridge assured the crossing of the 42d, 45th and 20th Armored Divisions and began the northward thrust which ended in the capture of Munich.

With the Danube crossed and the enemy in full retreat toward Munich, Company B was ordered to follow the armored spearhead to secure and hold bridgeheads, clear roads, and make reconnaissance. The balance of the company followed the motorized advance. By 0240 the Company arrived at Beberach, Germany.

By the end of the month the Infantry was already in Munich. Late on 30 April the Engineers arrived and took up billets in the city. The enemy had been completely routed and were fleeing in confusion. It was evident then that it would not be many days before all resistance would collapse.

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AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

APRIL 1945

SILVER STAR

2d Lt Arthur J. Bush, O 553 732, Bn Hq, GO 28, 19 Apr 1945
S/Sgt Adelbert J. Hoyt, 6 574 617, H&S Co, GO 28, 19 Apr 1945
Sgt William M. Lamm, 37 703 424, Co A, GO 47, 28 Apr 1945

BRONZE STAR

Lt Col Ellis O. Davis 019 387, Bn CO, GO 22, 3 Apr 1945

PURPLE HEART (POSTHUMOUS)

Pfc Robert W. Beener, 37 676 284, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Pfc Robert E. Burrows, 34 965 717, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
1st Lt William A. Fincke, O 527 153, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Capt Michael Sherer, O1 104 393, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Pfc Ernest J. Hill Sr, 39 138 935, Co B, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Pvt Harry J. Evans, 33 606 205, Co A, GO 46, 28 Apr 45.
Cpl Kenneth J. Harrison, Sr, 39 138 727, Co A, GO 46, 28 Apr 45
Pfc Charles E. Miller, 32 283 592, Co A, GO 46, 28 Apr 45
Tec 5 Russell L. Pieper, 36 684 741, Co B, GO 46, 28 Apr 45
Pvt Emmett C. Horschmann, 37 636 608, Co A, GO 46, 28 Apr 45

PURPLE HEART

Capt George M. Fullmore, O1 103 168, Co A, GO 21, Hq 9th EH, 3 Apr 45
Pfc Joseph Popynin, 33 699 274, Co A, GO 21, 9th EH, 3 Apr 45
Pvt Delva M. Spurlin, 35 827 543, Co A, GO 21, 9th EH, 3 Apr 45
1st Lt Charlie J. Hensley, O1 106 813, Co A, GO 82, 51st EH, 6 Apr 45
Tec 5 Andrew A. Cornetta, 32 996 432, Co A, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Pfc John Iskades, 12 009 215, Co A, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Sgt Albert J. Maisel, 36 596 276, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Pfc James L. Wathen, 35 932 421, Co C, GO 26, 11 Apr 45
Capt Robert L. Jackson, O 407 496, Co C, GO 20, 11th Fd Hosp, 24 Apr 45
Sgt Virgil A. Foster, 38 588 772, Co C, GO 40, Hq 67th (US) GH, 25 Apr 45
Tec 4 James F. Mikles, 39 107 008, H&S Co, GO 32, 9th Evac H, 27 Apr 45
Pfc Arthur B. Wright, 18 108 212, Med Det, GO 32, 9th Evac H, 27 Apr 45
1st Lt Richard P. Bottcher, O 320 869, Bn Hq, GO 32, 9th Evac H, 27 Apr 45
Cpl George W. Bussell, 34 882 584, Co C, GO 46, 28 April 1945
1st Lt Ernest T. Kimbrough, O 527 121, Co B, GO 46, 28 Apr 45