

SECRET

L-1051

# HISTORY of OPERATIONS

## 142<sup>d</sup> ENGR. BN.

### MARCH 1945

CLASSIFICATION  
**CANCELLED**  
BY AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
*Henry J. Griffin Capt A.G.T.*  
DOWNGRADING COMMITTEE 20 May 1946

SECRET

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S E CORRECTION

L-1051

HISTORY OF OPERATIONS  
142D ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION  
for the month of  
MARCH 1945



Unit History - 1 Mar - 31 Mar 1945  
142d Engineer Combat Battalion

L-1051

NARRATIVE

The month of March began with the main emphasis still on active defense. In this the Engineers played a vital role. All companies attended the mine school conducted at La Petite Pierre by the Battalion with the assistance of personnel from the 7th Army mine school at Epinal. Here the men were familiarized with both description and functioning of the more commonly used enemy mines as well as instructed on new mines recently discovered and what uses the Germans made of existing mines of occupied countries. One of the main things stressed was the inadvisability of picking up mines. The pulling and blowing of enemy mines wherever possible was stressed. We were later to find out that due to the swiftness of our advance many of our ideas about mine removal had to be revised.

When not in mine school, mine detector teams were being trained in using the SCR 625 - non-metallic mine detector. Later these men instructed the Infantry in the use of these instruments.

While B & C Companies were busy maintaining the MFS for their respective regiments, Co A began building a new road from Musenthal North of Fosteig to Althorn as the enemy kept the existing road under continuous artillery fire. The men worked day and night, sweeping for mines, cutting trees, building bridges and culverts, and grading and ditching. The new road, many times under enemy small arms and sniper fire. One sniper was killed at Althorn. Meanwhile, Company C was searching for reported minefields but none were found. Company E was busily engaged in building gun emplacements and wiring in friendly minefields.

Lt Ernest T. Kimbrough with a detail from the 1st Platoon of Company were given a mission of laying an AP minefield on the division right flank. Platoon Leader, Lt Kimbrough, Cpl Benson, Tec 5 Febelle with the Infantry company commander and two riflemen went forward to reconnoiter the proposed site. Upon arriving at the site they were fired upon by an enemy machine gun and a few riflemen. The infantry company commander was fatally wounded. The party returned the fire and at the same time Lt Kimbrough ordered two of the men to evacuate the Infantry Captain which was done as the party withdrew, by fire and movement. The enemy then threw a few 50mm Mortar rounds into the area. Lt Kimbrough took command of the available Engineer and Infantry soldiers, deployed them against the enemy and prepared to attack. Artillery and mortar fire was called for and directed on the enemy at which time Lt Kimbrough and his party returned to the site and laid the AP Mines.

From March 4th to 9th, Lt Col Davis was on temporary duty with VI Corps accompanying the 9th Infantry Division following the 1st Army breakthrough. Major George M. Elliott assumed command of the Battalion.



On March 6th the front line companies and platoons were inspected to see if they knew the location of existing minefields. A number of improperly marked minefields were discovered and the proper corrections were made.

Company A came upon an unmarked minefield in which was lying a body of an American soldier. A number of men attempted to crawl out to recover the body but each time they were driven back by intense machine gun and sniper fire. The mission was uncompleted that day. However, the next day the men returned for the second time. Doggedly they attempted to reach the body but each time they were driven back by enemy fire. One man was wounded while trying to crawl to the body so the mission was abandoned again and then completed the next day.

On the night of March 11 we thought sure we would get a taste of fighting. The entire Battalion was alerted for a possible parachutist attack. Guard posts were strengthened and the guards were doubly vigilant. However, night passed without incident. Our wish for fighting was unfulfilled but not for long. Although unaware at the time, plans were already being made for the push which was to come four days hence.

Commencing about 12 Mar 45 the logistics of war began to indicate that something big was about to break. The medical Battalion moved the clearing station forward to the vicinity of La Petite Pierre and called for a mine sweeping detail to check a field being used as a parking lot for ambulances. The S-2 section was given orders to procure additional maps. All jeeps were ordered sand-bagged. Prefabricated culverts were constructed using gasoline drums welded together and corrugated sections were bolted together to give each company a minimum of two culverts in readiness for expedient repair of blown bridges. All available minefield records were submitted to the French Army so that in the future all minefields could be removed as seen fit by the French.

It was requested that the men attending "weasel" operators school be returned for duty with their equipment. They were made available with their tracked jeeps at the ratio of one per company. The S-4 section established a forward dump near Vimmenou with timber, mines, culverts and explosives.

Tactical development indicated a full scale attack with each forward company of Engineers reconnoitering for lanes to be breached and cleared of mines. All three Regiments and Engineer companies were put into the line abreast. Lt Petherton of Company C was given the mission of opening the road north from Reipertswiller. This task meant clearing mines and abatis from about two miles of road.

On March 14th the Engineer Battalion CP displaced forward to a woods just north of Vimmenou in readiness for attack the next day.

At 0645, 15 March 45 the push began. During the night the Engineers had mapped three minefields in the Main Line of Resistance through which the Infantry passed. At 0700, Third Platoon Company B under Lt Anthony Tuccillo joined "C"



Group of the 117th Recon Squadron with orders to sweep roads ahead of Fcn vehicles. With foot troops as point and flank protection, they advanced from the CP toward Althorn sweeping and removing mines as they went. During the entire morning they were subjected to heavy enemy artillery, mortar and small arms fire. By 1300 the fire became so intense that the men were forced to abandon their mission and seek shelter in the town of Althorn. The following is the Platoon Leaders account of the action that had just taken place.

We departed from the bivouac at 0700 and arrived at Althorn at 0800. Our mission was to clear the road from Althorn to Mutterhouse. Immediately upon arrival we received "88" fire -- but the fire was light. We waited until 1100 to start and following up the sweepers were two tanks and two Tank Destroyers for support. Very light security was provided by the 117 Fcn Troop. We started sweeping the road out of town and had advanced about 300 yards when 88's and mortars increased the rate of fire. The men hit the ground when shells came in and then got up and continued sweeping. This continued for two hours and the platoon had advanced 800 yards, at which time sweepers reached a bend in the road which put them under observation of an old mill. When a large portion of the platoon had passed the bend burp gun fire was received from the mill and pinned us down. All during this time 88 and mortar fire was heavy. Supporting armor could not fire on the mill to silence the burp gun because a string of mines had been placed across the road in the bend.

Cpl Tagge made three attempts to pull the mines out but was driven back by the small arms fire. The fourth attempt was successful. The tank moved up and placed 12 rounds into the mill -- no more fire was received from the mill (for a while). For this action Cpl Tagge received the Silver Star.

In spite of daring shown by Tagge the mission was still held up by 88 and mortars. For the next hour the enemy threw shell after shell into our group. The entire operation was pinned down. At about 1630 the CO of the Fcn troop decided to send patrol cross country with two sweepers attached to find and clear road to Mutterhouse. Sgt Lee and 9 men went with patrol. Patrol was engaged in fire fight at about 2100 and did not disengage itself until about 2300. At 1730 the remainder of platoon was ordered to return to bivouac area. The feeling of relief at being withdrawn from such a hot spot was very evident. The next morning the platoon successfully cleared the road of 80 mines and 200 yards of abatis without opposition and opened up a major division route of advance.

Fcn Troop CP counted approximately 300 rounds of shells that were thrown at us. For the intense period of fire, approximately one round per minute came at us. The strain undergone by the men was shown by the fact that many men (including the platoon leader) became sick to their stomachs when the order to stop operations was received. All men were completely exhausted mentally.

For its first experience under fire the men of the 3rd Platoon Company B behaved like veterans and deserve to take pride in the way they conducted themselves. The tankers, 30 months overseas service, said it was the most intense Peinie fire they ever received. We readily agreed.



The next day Company A was sent to clear the roads North East of Pothbac while Company B began clearing the Althorn-Meuterhouse road. Meanwhile Company C swept for mines and built a ford at Reipertswiller. The Tank dozer and a crew were busy clearing an abatis on the Reipertswiller-Barenthal road when its tread was knocked off by a mine. However work continued and by the next day they met Company A which had been clearing the Zinswiler-Barenthal road. Company B, less one platoon which was attached to Task force Coleman cleared the road from Althorn to Meuterhouse.

Meanwhile, on the same day 17 March 45, the Engineer reconnaissance section was busily reconnoitering roads for the new MSF. One vehicle containing S/Sgt A.J. Hoyt, Tec 5 Lyle L. Given and Tec 5 Cecil O. Smalley, while on the mission crossed into Germany. Thus they became the FIRST members of the Rainbow to cross the German border in 26 years.

The next three days were busy ones for the entire battalion. The Infantry had done a marvelous job in routing the enemy and was travelling at top speed with the Engineers right behind them. Most of the roads were obstructed by abatis craters and blown bridges. Abatis were cleared and craters were filled in record time. Where ever possible at stream crossings, fords were built. Where fords were impossible bridges and culverts appeared as if like magic.

Some bridges were found still in tact for the enemy had fled before they could be blown although they were prepared for blowing. Volunteers from Engineers with the forward elements removed the demolitions.

One squad with a tankdozer began clearing road blocks and abatis on the Peterbashaal-Ludwigswinkel road. Here an egg grenade rigged as a booby trap, exploded, seriously wounding one EM and slightly wounding three others. Then the Infantry decided that the Engineers and the dozer were too far forward so the Engineers and the dozer were pulled back.

The men needed sleep and needed it badly but they kept on with their work. If the Infantry could fight without sleep, the Engineers would see to it that they wouldn't lack supply roads.

By 21 March the doughs were pounding at the Siegfried line. At Fischbach and Ludwigswinkel the Germans put up stubborn resistance and the drive was temporarily stopped.

To pick up the attack and drive on ahead through the Siegfried Line Col Davis called on his experience and knowledge gained while acting as an observer on the Northern front in early March. Col Davis had, along with a group of officers from the Division, gone to First Army Headquarters at SPA, Belgium with the mission of studying methods of breaching the Siegfried Line. He reported to the 9th Infantry Division and accompanied that division on its attack through the Siegfried into Germany. This was the famous recovery the First Army made after



the extensive penetration by the Germans in December. Col Davis studied the Division staff planning including Infantry, Artillery, and Engineer tactics. He brought back the results of action employing flame throwers, prepared charges, and results of destruction. His belief in "velocity warfare" for all size units was proven here.

In the early morning hours of 22 March reconnaissance parties were sent out by all three companies to locate enemy pillboxes. Then under the supporting fire of BAR's and rifles, the Engineers placed shaped and satchel charges against the pillboxes demolishing them and destroying their contents. Many times during the day and night the Engineers were ahead of the Infantry. Company B alone destroyed 18 pillboxes with their contents and took 8 prisoners. By night fall the Infantry had the Germans again on the run and the so called impregnable Siegfried line was breached.

It was during this same attack that Lt Arthur J. Bush accompanied by S/Sgt Adelbert J. Hoyt made a foot reconnaissance through the enemy defense system. They located a large explosive charge which had been previously reported by an escaped Russian slave laborer.

While Lt Bush made a further reconnaissance, Sgt Hoyt dug at the site of the charge with his hands and mess kit uncovering a detonating cord. On hearing voices he turned to investigate, as Lt Bush returned from his reconnaissance. Together they investigated a well concealed pillbox approximately one hundred yards away, capturing ten enemy soldiers.

After delivering their prisoners to other troops they returned to the charge and continued excavating, guarding the site to prevent possible detonation by the remaining enemy, to this action each was subsequently awarded the Silver Star.

With the Siegfried Line breached and General Patton's juncture with the Seventh Army, organized resistance West of the Rhine River collapsed. There was little else for the Infantry to do but clean up scattered remnants of the German Army.

On 23 March the Battalion moved into the vicinity of Dehn, Germany and established a bivouac. While the Infantry mopped up the remnants of the enemy, the Engineers were getting new MSR's in shape for the division. Abatis and road blocks were cleared. Roads were swept for mines and cleared of enemy vehicles. Craters were filled.

Each company was assigned an area to find and destroy the remaining pillboxes of the Siegfried Line. In two days time more than 140 pillboxes were destroyed consuming 103,00 pounds of explosives. The only casualty in the operation was Lt Kimbrough of Company B. Lt Ernest T. Kimbrough and the 1st Platoon of



Company B were demolishing pillboxes of the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Dahn, Germany. The party was using approximately 500 lbs of explosive in each of the pillboxes to completely demolish them. On one occasion part of the charge did not blow the roof off of the pillbox. Lt Kimbrough entered the pillbox to investigate and was overcome by the gas of the explosion. Tec 5 Febelle entered the pillbox and tried to locate him but was unable to. He then called for help and S/Sgt Brazowski came to help him. Together they again entered the pillbox and located the officer when they saw the beam of the flashlight he was using. They pulled the officer out of the pillbox and artificial respiration was given him for an hour. Lt Kimbrough was then evacuated through medical channels.

On 26-27 March, a reconnaissance was made of routes suitable for convey forward to the Rhine River. Use was made of information obtained from 7XT Corps to which the division was then attached.

On 28 March a reconnaissance was made of the roads and a possible bivouac sight across the Rhine River.

Meanwhile, the entire Battalion was preparing to move. Vehicles were given checks, equipment was cleaned and necessary repairs made.

On Saturday 31 March the Battalion crossed the Rhine River at Worms.



DECLASSIFIED

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AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

MARCH 1945

PURPLE HEART

Pvt Philip A. Bux, 31 018 877, Co. C, 21 Mar 45  
Tec 5 Charles W. Jacoby, 39 212 756, Co. B, 20 Mar 45  
Pfc Douglas F. McGuire, 32 995 609, Co. C, 22 Mar 45  
Pfc Walter J. Nowicki, 36 045 572, Co. C, 16 Mar 45  
Pfc Loyd L. Umstedt, 35 847 902, Co. C, 20 Mar 45  
Pfc Francis A. Zech, 35 571 994, Co. B, 28 Mar 45  
Pvt Philip A. Haugh, 31 018 877, Co. C, 21 Mar 45



ROSTER OF COMMANDERS AND STAFF

MARCH 1945

L-10

Battalion Commander  
Executive Officer  
S-1  
S-2  
S-3  
S-4  
Ln O  
Asst S-2  
Fen O  
Co Comdr. Co A  
Co Comdr. Co B  
Co Comdr. Co C  
Co Comdr. H&S  
Battalion Surgeon  
Battalion Dentist

Lt Col	ELLIS O. DAVIS
Major	GEORGE M. ELLIOTT
1st Lt	RICHARD P. BOTTCHEP
Capt	LUCIAN A. MASSIE
Major	HERBERT L. HULL
Capt	RICHARD L. COPELAND
Capt	JACK I. JOYNER
2d Lt	JACK SINGLETON JR.
2d Lt	ARTHUR J. BUSH
Capt	GEORGE M. FULLMORE
1st Lt	HAROLD J. FRIES
Capt	ROBERT L. JACKSON
Capt	ALFRED C. LAYWELL
Capt	VINCENT BELLAFIORE
Capt	ROLAND D. WOLFE