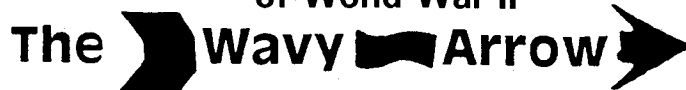


20th Combat Engineer Association

of World War II



December 2003

Happy Holidays

Your Association President J. Kenneth Noon and your Secretary-Treasurer George Griffenhagen extend best wishes for Happy Holidays and all the best for the New Year.

2004 Events Will Salute WWII Veterans

On Saturday afternoon, May 29, 2004, the National WWII Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C., will be officially dedicated. This will be preceded by musical tributes at the MCI Center in the nations capital on Friday afternoon and evening, May 28, and Saturday evening, May 29. There will also be an interfaith service on Saturday morning, May 29, at the Washington National Cathedral. For further information on all of these events, check the website at <www.wwiimemorial.com> or telephone toll free 1-800-639-4992.

On June 5-6, 2004, the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, and the Museum's fourth anniversary with two days of activities. They commence Saturday evening, June 5, with an event called "Wine and War" at the Louisiana Memorial Pavilion commemorating the launch of the invasion. On Sunday morning, June 6, a Sunrise Service will be followed by a Simultaneous Satellite Hook-Up with officials at Omaha Beach. For further information, check their website at <www.ddaymuseum.org> or send an e-mail to <info@ddaymuseum.org>

In August 2004 the final Reunion of the 20th Combat Engineers Assciation of WWII will be held in Washington, D.C. Watch for full details in the next issue of the *Wavy Arrow*.

Lost But Not Forgotten

Warren W. Berthel (Hq/1117th) died September 26, 2003, at the age of 87. After military service, he was an auto mechanic for many years until his retirement. George J. Allen reports that Berthel was "a good soldier and a good driver even under difficult conditions. Both he and his vehicle were always ready to go, when needed."

Roy A. Thomas (B/1340th) died November 12, 2003, at the age of 83. Agnes Simpson, whom Roy married in June 1942, writes: "Roy was so proud of his family and friends, but most of all the 20th Combat Engineers. We all love to read the *Wavy Arrow*, and wish to continue to receive each issue. Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$500.00 from Roy which he asked me to send after his death."

Follow-Up To Fayetteville Reunion

"I was very disappointed that I couldn't make the Reunion. I started driving but heard on the radio that Hurricane Isabel was off shore near Fayetteville, so decided not to chance the remainder of the trip. I thoroughly enjoyed the report on the Reunion in the last issue of the *Wavy Arrow*; it was the second best to having been there. Thank you for the refund. I would like to be at the last Reunion and will do my best to attend." Henry L. Smith, Officer

"I am sorry that we were forced to cancel our trip to Fayetteville at the last moment. We were very lucky considering so many people in our area lost electricity for several days. But there were downed trees and other wind damage from Hurricane Isabel. Reports had wind here in the county up to 73 miles per hour." Harry E. Moulder, Topoll 117th Gp.

"Thank you very much for the *Wavy Arrow* reporting on the activities at the Reunion on Fayetteville. I enjoyed reading it. Also, thank you for including us at your Reunion dinner. It was truly an honor for me to attend and hear first hand the rich history of the 20th."

Daniel G. Grey, Colonel
Brigade Commander
20th Engineer Brigade
Fort Bragg, North Carolina

News From Our Members

Elizabeth L. Cohen (widow of Max Cohen, 1117th Gp. Medic) writes: "My late husband, Max Cohen, was one of the doctors in the 20th and 1340th, and he always spoke fondly of all of you. I remember you from several Reunions that we attended, but I also remember visiting your group during the war. I was a nurse with the 59th Evacuation Hospital. Max and I met in Casablanca, and we managed to see each other occasionally during the war. Thank you for keeping the organization going, and I greatly appreciate for sending me the *Wavy Arrow* which I love to read."

Harry E. Moulder (Topoll 1117th Gp.) writes, "I enjoyed Joe Miller's commentary on the Chevy trucks. There were a great number of them at Camp Clairborne, but I don't remember ever seeing any in England or later; they were all GMC 2-1/2 ton trucks."

Wavy Arrow Contributions

Many thanks to the following for having made a contribution since the last issue of the *Wavy Arrow*.

Elizabeth L. Cohen (widow of Max Cohen, 1117th Gp. Medic)	\$25.00
Harry E. Moulder (Topoll 117th Gp.)	\$25.00
Peter J. Russ (C/1340th)	\$30.00
Henry L. Smith (Officer)	\$50.00
Peter M. Tarsi (B/20th)	\$20.00
Agnes Thomas (widow of Roy A. Thomas, B/1340th)	\$500.00

The Huertgen Forest Revisited

Stephen E. Ambrose describes the Battle of the Huertgen Forest as "as bad as American soldiers ever had to face, including the Wilderness [Civil War] and the Meuse-Argonne [World War I]" in *Citizen Soldiers* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1997). Then in the January 2003 issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, Truman Setliffe described how the 20th and 1340th were attached to the 28th Infantry Division on October 23, 1944. He then detailed how they were left without a promised heavy machine gun unit and a forward artillery observer from November 6th to November 10th when they were relieved after suffering heavy casualties.

We now have a copy of Cecil B. Currey's *Follow Me and Die* (Stein and Day Publishers, New York, 1984) describing further specific actions of the 20th and 1340th during this period in the Huertgen Forest. Here are some exact excerpts from this book.

On November 2nd when the 28th Infantry Division launched its campaign into the Huertgen Forest, they were strengthened by the 20th and 1340th Engineer Battalions who were responsible for repair and construction of all roads in the Vossenack-Germeter-Schmidt area. Their major task was to ensure the flow of traffic over the main supply route along the Kall trail. Early reports received by Lt. Col. Jonathan Sonnefield was that there was a bridge across the Kall River, but rumors persisted that it has been blown up. Capt. Henry Doherty (A Company, 20th) ordered his 2nd platoon to reconnoiter the route and determine the condition of the bridge. 2nd Lt. Robert Pierce followed the trail into the valley as far as the river and found that the bridge was intact.

On November 3rd, Capt. Edwin Lutz (B Company, 20th) received a report that the river crossing needed repairs before tanks could use it. He and Capt. Joseph Miller walked down the trail to check its condition and believed that it would bear the 33-ton weight Sherman M-4 tanks. However, the trail was in sad shape with occasional granite outcroppings. When Lutz passed this information on to the tank commander, the tankers were not convinced that the trail was passable. So Col. Edmund Daley ordered a small bulldozer to repair the trail leading to the Kall River bridge, but warned that they could not rely on infantry protection.

During the night of November 3-4, Companies A and B of the 20th labored with picks and shovels to widen the Kall trail. The work was slow and Lutz was impatient. Sometime after midnight, he strapped himself into the R-4 bulldozer and edged the dozer down the incline to a rock outcropping halfway to the river. However the dozer blade broke a cable at 0300 hours while trying to remove the granite facade thrusting out into the narrow roadway, and the weary engineers again reached for their picks and shovels. By 0500 hours word was sent to the tankers that the trail was ready. The first tank struck a mine throwing a track, while the second tank slipped off the left shoulder and got stuck in the steep, slippery sloop. Finally by 07300 the remainder of the tanks arrived in Kommerschmidt just in time to confront an attack by the Germans. By the following day, all available gasoline had been consumed by the tanks.

On November 5th, Capt. Walter Mahaley of C Company, 20th, sought more protection from the infantry, but discovered that the site of the 112th Infantry Regiment's Command Post had been abandoned without notifying the 20th and 1340th engineers. So Company C began digging in realizing that, "we are cut off." Meanwhile, at the Command Post of the 28th Infantry Division, Gen. Norman Cota remained totally unaware of the impending disaster.

On November 6th, Capt. Ralph Lind of C Company 1340th arrived with his men near Vossenack to serve as infantry, with only two 30-caliber machine guns and two bazookas. Around midnight, German troops attacked with an artillery barrage killing or wounding 50 percent of C Company, leaving only three officers and 18 enlisted men. Captain Lind was evacuated that night suffering from combat exhaustion.

On November 7th, B Company of the 1340th were providing security for the Kall River Bridge, and Capt. Thomas Creegan was placed in command of the remaining C Company men, including Lt. Lunar Makousky and Staff Sergeant Ben Cipra who had but six men with him. Creegan was dismayed as he saw infantry retreating; at one point he ordered an infantry lieutenant accompanied by six men to dig in. After a few hours, the infantry officer told Creegan that they were going back to the vicinity of the U.S. artillery "where they would find no Germans." Company B, 1340th, suffered 44 casualties out of 99 men who went down into the gorge.

20th and 1340th engineers watched enviously as men of the 112th Infantry evacuated Vossenack. Why had they not also received word to leave? There was a reason, wrote author Cecil Currey. Although General Cota authorized the relief of the 112th Infantry Division, he wanted the engineers to stay and help hold Vossenack.

On November 8th, Lt. Col. Truman Setliffe was ordered that his 1340th Battalion would continue their role as infantrymen to cover the withdrawal that night of the forces from Kommerschmidt, and that they should also keep open the road from Vossenack to the bridge in the Kall gorge so wounded men could be evacuated. Then on November 10th, Setliffe told his engineers of a German ultimatum to surrender or be slaughtered, to which they responded that they would "stick it out." On the night of November 10th, V Corps ordered infantry units with supporting weapons to relieve the engineers, and the 20th and 1340th withdrew from the Huertgen Forest.

Other books providing details on the Battle of the Huertgen Forest include Edwin P. Hoyt's *The G.I.s War* (Da Cappa Press, New York, 1988); Robert Sterling Rush's *Hell in Huertgen Forest* (University Press of Kansas, 2001); *History of the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion* ("P.T. Cermak," Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, 1945); *History of the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion* ("Novy Vsetisk," Klatovy, Czechoslovakia, 1945); *Follow the Wavy Arrow* by George F. Rankin, 1975; and *20th & 1340th Engineer Combat Battalions* by George Griffenhagen.

Send items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 2501 Drexel Street, Vienna, VA 22180.