

20th Combat Engineer Association

of World War II

The **Wavy Arrow**

March 2005

We Haven't Forgotten You

The *Wavy Arrow* is now being published on a quarterly basis. The last issue was issued in December 2004, and the next issue will appear in June 2005. We hope that you will enjoy the articles on the 20th Engineers in Sicily on pages two and three of this issue.

Letters Received

Charles C. Libby (H&S/20th Band) writes: "It is sad that there will be no more 20th Engineers Reunions, but one must face facts. My high school class of 1940 no longer has Reunions, Time marches on! This year's letter from Al Biggiani of the H&S Band hasn't been received yet so I hope that all is well. It is possible that he and I are the only two remaining members of the H&S Band. In last year's letter Al mentioned an incident that bears repeating. The 20th Band played for a show featuring Martha Raye at the Vox Theater in Casablanca in January 1943. She and the other talent put on quite a "leg show." I will never forget how she pointed me out and told me to 'Keep Your Eyes on the Musicians' which got quite a laugh. My friends in Luxembourg tell me that they will never forget their liberation in September 1944. It is unfortunate that if I mention to some of our own people events like Normandy, Huertgen Forest, and the Battle of the Bulge, I get a blank look as though they don't know what I am talking about. I really do enjoy the stories that are published in the *Wavy Arrow* that bring back many memories. Your efforts are greatly appreciated, so hang in there. I hope the enclosed contribution will help."

Henry L. Smith (Officer) writes: "Last summer Hurricane Charlie ripped into my community and badly damaged about 25 percent of my mobile home which is located about 20 miles from Punta Gorda where massive damage was done. Then Hurricane Francis took a board off the front of my home. I figured that somebody was trying to tell me something, so I took off for Virginia where I stayed for about five weeks until the hurricane season was over. I wish I could think of a story for the *Wavy Arrow* as you have requested, but every time I tell someone about the events in my life, they tell me that I must be insane. The unusual happened to me during World War II and is still continuing. However, I always look at the bright side of life and it is never dull. I appreciate each issue of the *Wavy Arrow* and I am enclosing a contribution so that you can continue to publish and mail it to those of us who enjoy reading the various stories about the 20th Combat Engineers.

[Editor's Note: Henry Smith also included an article on his experiences in Korea which will be published in a future issue.]

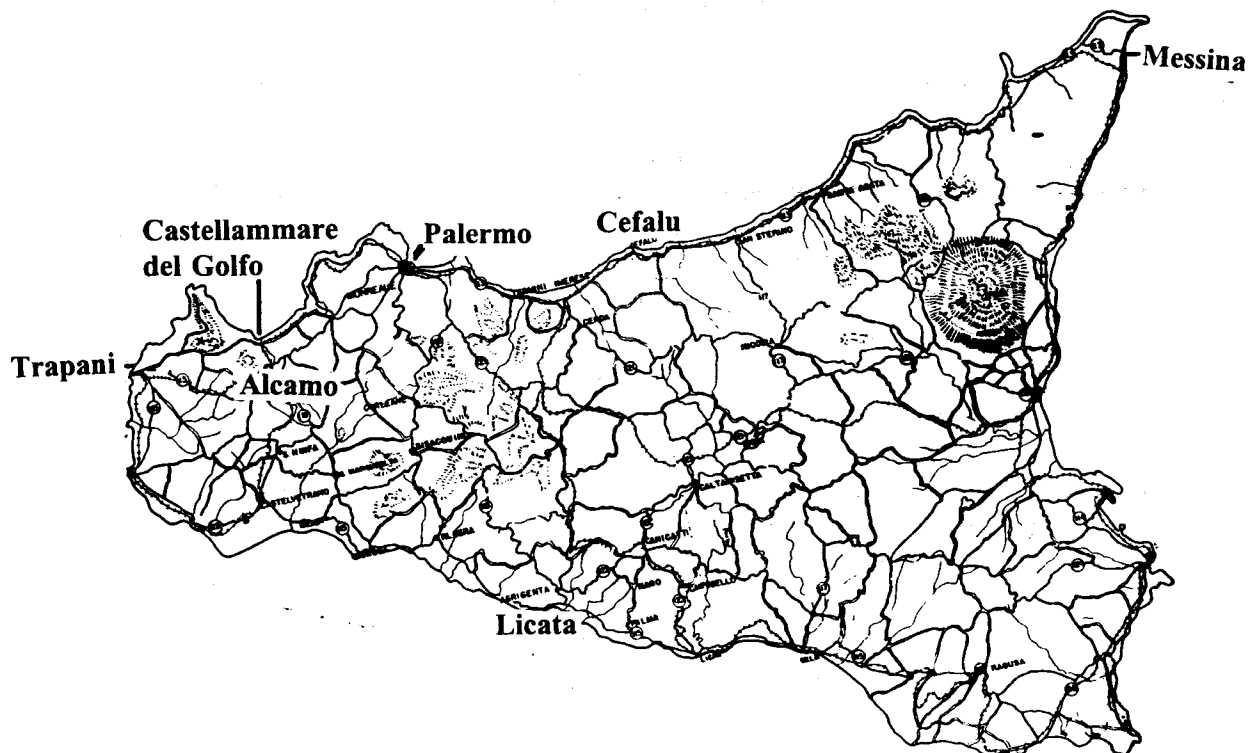
20th Engineers in Sicily

By Truman Setliffe

The 20th Engineer Combat Regiment landed near Licata, Sicily, on D-Day (July 10, 1943) with the 3rd Infantry Division as part of General George Patton's Seventh Army. Two weeks later (July 23, 1943) the Regimental headquarters and the First Battalion (Companies A, B, and C) entered Palermo with the 3rd Division. Our first project was to clear the docks of debris and repair the airfield's runway. Meanwhile the Second Battalion (Companies D, E, and F) supported the 82nd Airborne Division in clearing out the western half of the island. (See the following article for more information on some of their experiences.)

Our mission was then to provide a supply route to the port of Messina at the extreme east of the island. We had to repair or replace the dozens of bridges that the Germans had blown in their retreat along the rugged coastline from Palermo to Messina. In some cases we placed concrete roadways across dry streams rather than replace bridges. In other cases we used the British-developed Bailey Bridge. In concept it was somewhat like a child's Erector set to be hand assembled. Each steel panel had a hole drilled on each corner so that it could be bolted to adjacent panels. They were then assembled as trusses and placed parallel to each other to allow one-way traffic for tanks and trucks,

The two-span railroad bridge near Cefalu had been blown apart, but the large pier had been left standing. We decided that a triple/triple Bailey Bridge (three panels wide and high) would support a locomotive. We advised the Seventh Army Engineers what we were doing but they had their doubts. So they sent an inquiry to the Bailey Bridge designers who also had their doubts. By this time we had completed our work and had run a loaded train across the two spans. Our response to the doubters was: "We know it works. We have tried it. We are the 20th Engineers proud."



Noted reporter Ernie Pyle described our work in one of his "Roving Reporter" columns as follows: "During the latter days of the Sicilian campaign, I spent all of my time with the combat engineers who were in it up to their ears. Scores of times during the Sicilian fighting I heard the expression voiced by everybody that 'this is certainly an engineer's war.' And indeed it was. Every foot of our advance upon the gradually withdrawing enemy was tempered by the speed with which our engineers could open the highways, clear the mines, and by-pass the blown bridges."

By August 17, 1943, the war in Sicily was over, and on November 11, 1943, the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment departed Palermo for Great Britain, where the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment was divided into two separate Battalions, the 20th and the 1340th, as well as the 1171st Group for the June 6, 1944, invasion of Normandy.

Memories of Western Sicily by George Griffenhagen

As a 19 year-old Pfc with Captain Thomas Creegan's Company E (having joined the Unit as a replacement two months earlier in North Africa), I well remember when we were ordered to make contact with the 82nd Airborne Division. When Company E entered the town of Alcamo on July 23, we had an audience of several hundred Italian soldiers with slung rifles who were so surprised to see us that they didn't have time to surrender. We hurried out of Alcamo where we stopped awaiting more information. By mid-afternoon a weapons carrier came barreling down the road with an 82nd Airborne officer who wanted to know why we were so far from his troops. After an explanation, the officer asked Captain Creegan to assign four engineers to accompany him to occupy Castellammare del Golfo. I was one of the four Company E engineers selected for this assignment.

By the time we reached the town center, the Plaza was crowded with residents who were eager to greet us and to proudly shout the only English phrases they had learned: "Mussolini a Son-of-a-bitch" and "I gotta brother in Brooklyn." We were then introduced to the police chief and the resident were ordered to clear the streets. After the 82nd Airborne officer left, the police took us to the Fascist headquarters where we broke in and found a well-stocked bar filled with a variety of tempting alcoholic beverages.

Later that evening several agitated police returned insisting that we accompany them. Since I was the only one who was still sober, they took me to a luxurious apartment where a well decorated Italian army officer made it clear that he wanted to surrender his nearby garrison. In spite of language difficulties, I was able to finally to convince the Italian officer that this could be better done the next day, and everyone then retired for the night.

The Battle of Sicily by Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr. and Friedrich von Stauffenberg (Orion Books, New York, 1991) reports that "the small port of Castellammare del Golfo surrendered to Col. Tucker's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment on the afternoon of July 23, 1943, without a fight." As you now know, it was a squad of four engineers of Company E that actually occupied this picturesque town. Two days later, troops of the 82nd Airborne relieved us so that we could continue on to Trapani to rehabilitate the airfield, and then eventually join the rest of the Second Battalion to help repair the bridges from Palermo to Messina.

Wavy Arrow Contributions

We thank the following for having made a contribution to keep the *Wavy Arrow* coming to you on a regular basis. Please consider one if you haven't made a contribution recently.

Cheryl Ellefson (on behalf of John C. Horton, B/20th)	\$10.00
Charles F. Hurley (A/20th)	\$10.00
Charles C. Libby (H&S/20th Band)	\$50.00
Kathleen Petty (on behalf of Miller L. Petty, A/1340th)	\$25.00
James Salerno (A/1340th)	\$50.00
Henry L. Smith (Officer)	\$100.00
Emmanuel J. Wasinger (A/1340th)	\$25.00

Notes From Our Bulletin Board

Lochlin Willis Caffey died on December 12, 2004, at the age of 82. He was son of Eugene Mead Caffey, commander of the 20th Combat Engineer Regiment in North Africa. Both were graduates of West Point: Eugene Caffey in 1918 and his son in 1945. Before his retirement in 1956, General Eugene Caffey served as U.S. Army Judge Advocate General. After concluding a 30 year career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Colonel Lochlin Willis Caffey helped to lead the Clinch River Breeder Reactor project in Oak Ridge, TN.

Ancel Keyes died on December 20, 2004, at the age of 100. You may ask, who was Ancel Keyes? He was a University of Minnesota public health scientist who invented the K Rations that were consumed by millions of soldiers during World War II.

Bernard P. McDonnell (Officer) has moved again. His new mailing address is 3825 SE 80th Avenue, Apt. 301, Portland, OR 97206. He says he only moved to another floor.

Violet Porter (Widow of Phil Porter, 1171st Group) recently died according to her son, Ralph A. Porter of Kokomo, Indiana.

Worth a Chuckle

An inefficient colonel had been given a different job and was assigned to a new office. As he set down at his desk for the first time, an enlisted technician knocked on the door. "Come in," said the colonel, pretending to be busy on the telephone." He then said into the phone, "Yes, general. I will take care of it right away." He then placed the telephone on the cradle and asked his visitor, "What can I do for you?" The technician replied, "I just came to connect your telephone."

Send Contributions, Letters, Articles, Photographs, Obituaries, and other News Items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 2501 Drexel Street, Vienna, VA 22180. If it is more convenient, you can send it by e-mail at <ggriffenhagen@aphanet.org>.