

20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II



September 2006

D-Day on Omaha Beach

After two campaigns in Africa and one in Sicily, the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment moved to England. On January 21, 1944, the Regiment was reorganized. The Regiment's First Battalion became the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion, commanded by Major Johnathon E/ Sommerfield. The 2nd Battalion of the Regiment became the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion, commanded by Major Truman H. Setliffe. Headquarters became the 1171st Engineer Combat Group under the command of Edmund K. Daley. Four and a half months later the new units moved to marshalling areas to board ships to be headed across the English Channel to Omaha Beach on the coast of France for another D-Day (the first being on November 8, 1942, near Fedela, French Morocco, and the second being on July 10, 1943, near Licata, Sicily). What follows are accounts of both the 20th and the 1340th on Omaha Beach.

Company A, 20th Engineer Combat Battalion:

By Tom Tuminello, Sr. (H&S, 20th Combat Engineer Battalion)

In the staging area in southern England, Company A of the 20th Combat Engineer Battalion was called to see a sand model of Omaha Beach for the invasion. I was asked to stay with four other soldiers and we were selected to carry a new mine detector on to the beach. We were supporting the First Infantry Division for the landing with the first wave.

As we were going in on the morning of June 6th, our landing craft hit a mine which killed three and wounded eighteen. We landed in water up to our knees and zig-zagged across the sandy beach up to the cliff as German gunners were firing on us from the pill box at the top of the cliff. We were there a short time when the first sergeant came to me and Joe Piekarski and told us that someone had left the dynamite on board the landing craft and we needed it to blow a hole in the cliff for the tanks to get to the top.

We left our guns and the mine detector against the cliff and took off across the beach, into the water, and up the ramp of the landing craft which was still where we left it. Bullets began hitting the wall of the craft and we slid into the hole and grabbed the dynamite. As we slid out of the hole, bullets pinned us down. All of a sudden we heard a voice coming through a vent on the side wall of the landing craft. The voice said, "When he has changed his belt on the machine gun, I will say go and you take off." When he said, "go," we took off into the water and onto the sandy beach zig-zagging again to the cliff. We made it and the hole was blown in the cliff for the tanks. I thank the one person left on the landing craft who was talking to us through the vent.

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Lost But Not Forgotten

Elwood Hannings, Jr. (H&S/20th) died April 27, 2006, at the Brittany Point, Pennsylvania, retirement community where he had been a resident for ten years. Immediately following his Army discharge after World War II, he enlisted in the Army Reserves in which he continued for 29 years. In August 1945 he married his "War Bride," Helen Pryde Hannings of Edinburgh, Scotland, who died in May 1990. Elwood then spent 33 years as purchasing agent at the State Correctional Institution in Graterford, retiring in 1980. He was interred at Green Lawn Cemetery in Upper Gwynedd, Pennsylvania. His son, Colin Hannings, writes that his father enjoyed having me read the *Wavy Arrow* to him as the years went by.

Anna B. Knorr (wife of Francis Knorr, A/20th) died November 26, 2005. Francis writes that he and Anna had been married for just over sixty years.

James H. Jacobi (Officer) died August 5, 2006. According to his daughter, Nancy White (5 Pine Tree Point, North Little Rock, AR 72116-8315) her father was buried with a 21-gun salute in the National VA Cemetery in North Little Rock. Her mother is now living with her daughter, but is in her own fight for life.

Walter Wolczanski (A/20th) died June 25, 2006. As reported in the last issue of the *Wavy Arrow* when we noted the death of Doris on March 20, 2006, we described that Walter was undertaking chemotherapy for lung cancer. Walter was an avid sports enthusiast loving fly fishing and golf. Bob Pearson who attended the funeral sent us a photograph of the Mt. Oliver Cemetery tombstone and Walt's automobile license plate recording that Walt was wounded twice during his service with the 20th Combat Engineers. His daughter, Becky Warner, sent us a copy of the obituary.

Ken Noon Is Ailing

Association President Ken Noon has spent some time in the VA hospital and now is in a Nursing Home in Gladstone, Missouri, with preliminary signs of Alzheimers. His son, Greg, is now living in Ken's home at 7804 Grant Lane, Apartment #4, Overland Park, KS 66204, and suggests that the *Wavy Arrow* still be sent to his home. Greg visits his father on a regular basis and will take the newsletter as well as any correspondence sent to him as they are received.

Irwin Jurs (C/1340th) who was living in Florida is now missing and his mail is now being returned without any explanation. Does anyone know if he is still living?

Dominic Carini Has Moved

Dominic A. Carini (B/1340th) writes: "My wife, Lorriane, died on May 16, 2006, after a brief illness. I have now moved to a Senior Independent Living Complex. My new address is 50 Cold Spring Road, #340, Rocky Hill, CT 06067. My telephone number remains the same: 860-571-8946. Enclosed is a check to continue with the *Wavy Arrow*."

1340th Engineer Combat Battalion

By Truman H. Setliffe, Commander, 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion

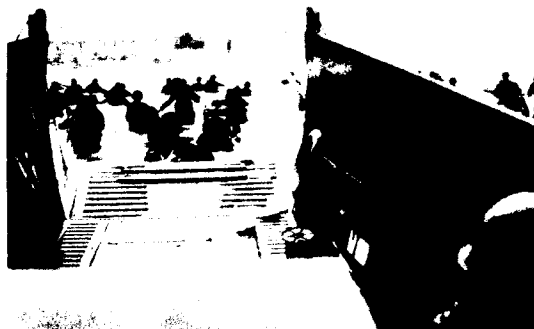
On May 17, 1944, the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion moved to a marshalling area near Callington, Cornwall, in southern England. Between June 2 and June 4, part of the Battalion's personnel and heavy equipment loaded onto an *LST* (Landing Ship Tank) in Falmouth Harbor. I was the senior officer aboard the ship. As fate would have it, the commander of the *LST* was Captain Budd whose brother I had known in Ft. Lauderdale.

On the evening of June 5, 1944, our *LST* sailed into the English Channel as part of a convoy headed for an early landing on Omaha Beach, later referred to as "Bloody Omaha." As we approached the beach, Captain Budd and other *LST* commanders received word, presumably from V Corps commander General Leonard T. Gerow, "Don't bring those ships in yet. We are getting a lot of resistance from the Germans."

About 3:00 p.m., on June 6th, I asked Captain Budd to let a small boat over the side to take to the beach part of the Battalion staff (Captain Bruce Renfro, Lt. Carlton, two sergeants, and myself). We told Budd that we wanted to find V Corps headquarters and get briefed on the probable assignments when the entire Battalion landed. Captain Budd responded: "Well, if that's what you want, I will do it." Other personnel remained aboard the *LST* awaiting orders to land.

Getting off the *LST* into the small boat in a very rough sea was in itself an adventure. In any event we landed in a small cover area and quickly moved to get behind an eight foot embankment. We could hear occasional small arms fire. Our Recon officer had not combat experience and at the end of the day he was "anxious to take a look." We never saw him or heard from him again.

It was soon dark and so rather than wander around in the dark, we remained behind the embankment. It was a very long and cold night. The next morning we headed up the beach. Soon we saw evidence that the beach had been "cleaned up." Bodies were literally stacked up like cordwood about five feet high. "Bloody Omaha" indeed.



LCVP heading to Omaha Beach
and disembarking from the craft

About a mile and a half from where we had landed, we met General Timberlake, an anti-aircraft artilleryman, who was looking through field glasses in an effort to spot the *LST* that was carrying his personnel and equipment. After discussing our mutual concerns, he pointed to a trail which would lead us to General Gerow's headquarters. Soon we saw General Gerow, saluted, and told him of our situation. He seemed please to see us since he had twice visited our camp in England. He advised us that he would get the 1340th personnel ashore as soon as he could. He then sent us to the Engineer V Corps headquarters to learn what was planned for us.

Company B, 1340th Combat Engineer Battalion

By George Griffenhagen (Company B, 1340th Combat Engineer Battalion)

Company B of the 1340th Combat Engineer Battalion was off shore on *LST 505* awaiting our turn to get ashore. Therefore, I had a better view of what was taking place than did my buddies who landed with the first wave. I shall never forget witnessing half-a-dozen warships circling near us and while facing the shore, they opened fire with all of their big guns. I had never seen a battleship fire their 14-inch guns and the explosions were deafening. It wasn't until later that I learned that two of the warships were the *USS Arkansas* and the *USS Texas*.

Meanwhile the Germans were shelling our ship but luckily the closest landed about 25 yards from our *LST*. Aboard our ship was the cadre of V Corps who had not seen any action before. They rushed to the railing yelling, "Look at the water spouts." Our response was, "Get down you idiots, the Krauts are shelling us." The first close-up sign we witnessed of the carnage that was taking place on the beaches was a pilotless Higgins boat floating by with a single dead GI lying in the center of the boat. Later we climbed down a rope ladder in heavy waves to get into a Higgins boat which took us near enough to the shore for us to wade another 30 yards to Omaha Beach.

Next Assignments for the 20th and 1340th

Soon after landing at Omaha Beach, both the 20th and 1340th Battalions were working on hazardous projects with front-line troops. Company A was assigned to support the 2nd Infantry Division by constructing a Bailey Bridge across the Aure River north of Trevieres, France. Soon the rest of the 1340th was busy setting up defensive positions in the Cerisy Forest; constructing a bridge near Le Molay; designing and constructing "Victory Circle" at a point where seven roads converged; and constructing a Bailey Bridge across a railroad overpass near Vire, France. They were not strangers to enemy artillery and small arms fire, as expected by combat engineers.

Ten members of the 20th were killed June 6-10, and 57 were wounded during the same period. *History of the 20th Engineer (Combat) Battalion*, "P.T. Cermak," Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, 1945.

Abbreviations: LCI = Landing Craft Infantry; LCVP = Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel or Higgins Boat; LST = Landing Ship Tank.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



Every member of the 20th and 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion received a copy of this single-sheet announcement signed by General Dwight Eisenhower before they landed on Omaha Beach.

The weather, which had been beautiful for the first three days of June, turned very nasty. Eisenhower received a weather report predicting that June 5 would be stormy, and he decided to postpone the invasion for at least one day for better conditions. Early June 5, Eisenhower obtained a report that the weather would improve by dawn on June 6, but the better weather would only last for a short time. While some staff felt that the weather was below acceptable minimums, Eisenhower declared, "I don't see how we can do anything else. Let's go."

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

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.

Dominic A. Carini (B/1340th)	\$25.00
Elwood Hannings (H&S/20th)	\$50.00
Bruce Porter (Commander/20th, 1994-1996)	\$25.00
James Salerno (A/1340th)	\$50.00
Frank Tarvin (C/20th)	\$30.00
Tom Tuminello (H&S/20th)	\$25.00
John Q. Webster (Officer)	\$50.00

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.