

# COMPANY B



120th Engineer Combat Bn.  
45th Infantry Division

HISTORY  
AND  
ADDRESS BOOK

## GENERAL'S MESSAGE

(Reprinted from Memorial Day Program, May 30, 1945, Munich, Germany)

With the pride of an American who sees a job well done, I have commanded the officers and men of this division and its attached units in the final phases of the defeat of Germany. You have fought long and courageously, and you were victorious. That victory cost the lives of many of your comrades, and it is to honor and remember them that we are here. To these men and to the families and homes from which they come, we all owe an undying gratitude. These men have made their own glory by their deeds. It is for us to see that they shall be eternally memorialized by the perpetuation of the ideals and principles for which they fought and fell.

ROBERT T. FREDERICK, *Maj. Gen.*



## COMPANY HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet was conceived in November 1945 just prior to the inactivation of the 45th Infantry Division and Company "B" of the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion. Even at that time very few of the "old timers" in the outfit were still in the army and Company "B" was made up mostly of men from the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion and the 328th Engineer Combat Battalion. Now in March as this history finally goes to press, few of the men who were with the company until inactivation remain in the service. These men whose names and address are in the last pages will find little to remember in the company history that follows. This history, however, is typical of any hard working and hard fighting engineer outfit and will serve to show the proud fighting record of Company "B".

In 511 combat days with the 45th Infantry Division the company has had ten company commanders and has had 60 men wounded and 20 killed in action. 25 Bronze stars have been awarded in "B" Company, 6 clusters to the Purple Heart, 7 Silver Star Medals, 2 oak leaf clusters to the Silver Star and 2 Soldier's Medals.

In brief, the combat picture of the outfit and the division looks something like this:

After 14 days of sailing, the company arrived in Oran, Africa on June 22nd of 1943 and on July 10 received their first baptism of fire on the shores of Sicily. The next few days were busily spent in the company's first real engineer work - destroying pillboxes, removing mines, filling craters, and numerous other tasks that fall to the lot of the engineers. By July 23rd our men were working above the village of Scillata constructing by-passes around blown out bridges. It was on August 1st that we lost our bull-dozer because of a mine and in that accident the driver became one of the first "B" company casualties in the ETO.

The next few weeks were spent in training for the Italian invasion and we also worked on our vehicles, tools and weapons to get them in top shape for the next combat test. On September 5th the men knew something was in the wind for the order came out to waterproof all vehicles and just 5 days later found the men of company "B" on the Italian mainland and constructing a bridge to get supplies to the 179th infantry regiment across the Calore River.

Enemy resistance was very stiff those first few weeks at Salerno beachhead and many times the company was ordered into defensive positions because of impending kraut attacks. These days were spent laying barbed wire for front line positions and doing some minor bridge construction. On October 24th despite excellent defensive terrain and abundance of enemy automatic weapons, coupled with deadly mortar and artillery fire, the 45th cracked the German defense of the Oliveto and Quaglietta area. During this time our engineers were filling craters and building by-passes and clearing roads so the rapid advance of the infantry and their supply trucks could continue. Heavy rains around October 3rd meant still more work for the engineers and "B" company men were busy keeping roads passable, building culverts and clearing the roads and streets of Benevento. It was on October 6th that our company lost one man and had three wounded while they were on a bridge reconnaissance near Benevento. The 3rd platoon that day lost two trucks completely and all the rest of their vehicles damaged. Finally on October 21st the 45th was relieved after spending 40 continuous days in combat, but we learned later that this combat time was short compared to other periods we were to spend in steady combat.

The first week in September found the engineers working on the Volturno river, constructing bridges and maintaining fords under heavy enemy artillery fire. November 13th was a big day in the outfit for on that day the first Christmas packages started to arrive in the mail ! ! Thanksgiving Day 1943 found the company still working on muddy roads and by-passes. The ration trucks couldn't even get up to us because of the thick, deep mud. From November 8th to the end of that month there were only three days in which it did not rain. Four bridges over the Volturno were washed out and bivouac areas, including "B" company's became marshes.

New Year's Eve found the 1st platoon constructing new roads in the vicinity of Filignano and the 2nd platoon maintaining roads in another sector. But on January 9th the entire division was relieved after 70 continuous days in combat, a total of 110 days out of our 121 in an active theater.



The third platoon, attached to the 179th Infantry, left for the Anzio beachhead nine days before the rest of the company and on January 30th the whole of Company "B" had landed and was working on that beachhead that was "as flat as a billiard table." Heavy casualties and steady attacks and counter-attacks earmarked the fighting during the month of February and in March heavy artillery duels and constant patrolling were the chief activities. "B" Company men these days were doing everything from laying barbed wire and digging gun emplacements to building roads and operating a rock quarry. Day after day we hauled rock and cut corduroy to make supply roads passable, and during the night the men would go out on reconnaissance patrols or to string barbed wire.

On April 13th the division was relieved after 79 consecutive days on the Anzio beachhead, but May 1st found us back on engineer work, removing mines, filling in craters and numerous other tasks. The third week in May was punctuated with the heaviest artillery barrages we had heard up to date, for our guns were softening up the krauts for our big push which started on May 26th. Chasing a fleeing enemy, the 45th raced to the south bank of the Tiber River, outflanked Rome and reached its last Italian objective on June 5th, a day before the Normandy invasion.

On the 4th of July we started water-proofing the vehicles again



*Engineers of the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion construct a trestle bridge outside Autrey, France near the end of September, 1944.*



*Company "B" men rehearse river crossing operations in March of 1945 prior to the last big push into Germany.*

and that could only mean one thing, for we were sure we weren't on the way home. The days during the month of July and the first part of August were spent on intensive amphibious training, and "B" Company conducted various mine and demolition schools for the infantry during this period.

On August 15th "B" Company landed on the shores of Southern France as a part of the 179th Regimental Combat Team against very light resistance under ideal conditions. Few road blocks and demolitions were found at first but we were brought up short at Meximieux, France when our entire company was ordered into a defensive position. German troops and tanks had broken through and before that day and the following night were over our company had 12 men wounded and one man killed. Stiffening resistance was met from this point on, and on September 18th we were relieved for a few days and assembled for a new attack.

The 3rd and 2nd platoons worked day and night on the 22nd of September to cross infantry in assault boats across the Moselle River. Planned demolitions, large road blocks and long tree blocks kept the company plenty busy, as did the constant minesweeping



and mine-clearing of roads. It was during this period that "B" Company had 5 different company commanders in a little over a week. Finally on November 9th, after 352 days of combat in the ETO we were again relieved and our company located its CP in the town of Fontenoy, France.

Back into action again on November 23, the company found itself in Alsace with plenty of work to do reducing prepared fortifications and clearing mines and barbed wire. As the division passed through towns like Zinswiller, Engwiller, Uttenhoffen and Gumbrechtshoffen Company "B" men were busy laying corduroy roads, filling craters, and clearing roads of mines and long tree blocks. It was on December 15th that elements of the division entered Germany for the first time and two days later Company "B" men were working on supply roads inside the country. On Christmas Day of 1944 our men used over 2000 pounds of explosive in blowing up 5 pill-boxes and New Year's Eve found the 3rd platoon of the company blowing in tunnels and pill-box entrances in German forts. Early in January we made preparations to withdraw from held positions and the division found itself on the defensive for the first time since Anzio.

For the rest of January and up to the middle of February "B" Company had plenty of work in keeping roads clear of snow, making roads passable by cutting corduroy, erecting fences for defensive positions and laying mine fields to add to the defense line that was being set up. On March 17th the division was relieved and our men got a much needed rest after their second winter in combat.

It was on the night of February 15th that "B" Company went into action again in crossing parts of the 180th Infantry across the swift Blies River below Sarreguemines on the German border. We lost one man killed that night and had four wounded and the men were exhausted after night and day attempts to erect a footbridge were finally successful. It was during this period that the company was awarded the Distinguished Unit or Presidential Citation.

Once through the Siegfried Line, high points in the drive across Germany were the Rhine River crossing, where our engineers went across in the assault waves with the 179th Infantry Regiment; the attack and fight for Nuremberg, where "B" company men with their tank-dozer removed many road blocks; the crossing of the Danube River, when the men paddled assault boats across the wide swift river for over 24 hours without a let-up; and finally the attack and the capture of Munich. It was outside of Munich in Dachau that many of the men could see for themselves one of the most startling examples of Nazi brutality and cruelty. Soon after we observed our last day of combat, the 511th, the war was officially over, and the engineers settled down to doing construction and maintenance work around the city of Munich.

After two months of occupation duty, the company was reorganized along with the division when the men who had more than 85 points were shipped to units that were not scheduled to go to the Pacific theater. Our new engineers came mostly from the 328th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 103rd Infantry Division and from the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion of the 14th Division.

We spent the next month training for at that time the division was scheduled for the Pacific, but we looked forward to those 30

days of leave in the states and then some more duty in the U.S.A!

Around the end of July Company "B" left Germany with no regrets and landed in the assembly area near Rhiems, France after a hectic 3-day train ride in "40 and 8's". We trained some more at Camp St. Louis but for most of the men it was a good rest. There were plenty of passes to Paris and Rhiems, some USO shows, baseball games and enough "sack time" for everyone concerned. A short train ride on the 20th of August brought us to Camp Phillip Morris where we really started "sweatin' out" going home. The war with Japan had ended and we knew that few of us would go overseas again if we could once get home.

The S. S. Marine Devil was the ship that brought the engineer battalion home, and we docked in a foggy Boston harbor on the afternoon of September the 10th, 1945! The men were speedily sent to their respective reception stations for a 30 day leave and not a man refused the extra 15 days that were granted during the middle of the original 30 days at home.

Once those 45 days were over, and did they go fast, the men reported back to their reception centers where the 60-pointers were held for discharge and the rest of the outfit went by various ways to the assembly station at Camp Bowie, Texas.

This history finally goes to press and Company "B" of the 120th Engineer Combat Battalion has ceased to exist, but the friendships that have been made in the outfit, the spirit that has been built up and maintained and the ideals for which these men fought and worked and died will long continue.

Many thanks to T-5 Russ Hand whose accurate and complete company history made the above article possible.

#### COMPANY COMMANDERS OF COMPANY "B"

1. Capt. Richard M. Strong — Trnsf to Inf and KIA—Anzio, Italy
2. 1st Lt. Julian Yocum — — — — — KIA—Salerno, Italy
3. Capt. Arthur Tauscher — Trnsf to Div Hq.—Paestum, Italy
4. Capt. Max Hartnagel - Seriously wounded in action-Archettes, France
5. 1st Lt. Clark Williams - Seriously wounded in action-Archettes, France
6. 1st Lt. Ira D. Cooper — — — — — KIA — Memenil, France
7. 1st Lt. Bernard Gordon — — Temporary — Memenil, France
8. 1st Lt. Howard M. Cohen — — Temporary — Memenil, France
9. Capt. Wayne W. Bridges — Trnsf to 328th Eng. Bn — Memenil, France
10. Capt. Maurice K. Williams — With company until deactivation, Furstenfeldbruck, Germany

## OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN

As of September 1, 1945

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# COMPANY B RECEIVES THE PRESIDENTIAL CITATION

(The Text of the "B" Company Distinguished Unit Citation)

"COMPANY B, 120TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action during the period 13 to 15 March 1945 near Frauenberg, France. Company B, in support of an infantry battalion, was charged with the mission of providing crossings for foot troops who were to assault Siegfried Line positions across the Blies River. Personnel of Company B made extensive reconnaissance for crossing sites, cleared the areas of mines and began construction of a foot bridge after leading infantry elements had crossed on improvised structures. The bridge was completed only to be knocked out by a direct artillery hit. Work was recommenced, under heavy enemy small arms and artillery fire, while a second bridge was begun several hundred yards downstream. The bridge at the first site was completed four times, only to be destroyed by enemy artillery fire and the swift current. Although attempts to use assault boats failed because of the heavy enemy fire, personnel of Company B finally succeeded in constructing a bridge at the alternate site, permitting infantry to cross and secure the bridgehead. Company B completed a second bridge, then crossed the river and continued to work in support of the infantry in breaching the Siegfried Line. The tenacity, courage and determination displayed by the members of Company B reflect credit upon themselves and their organization."

## COMBAT DAYS FOR 45TH INFANTRY DIVISION 511 COMBAT DAYS IN ETO

SICILY—July 10 to August 1, 1943 (Sicilian Invasion & Campaign)  
 ITALY—Sept. 10 to October 20, 1943 (Italian Invasion & Campaign)  
 ITALY—Oct. 28 to January 11, 1944 (Italian Campaign)  
 ITALY-ANZIO—Jan. 29 to April 18, 1944 (Anzio Landing & Italian Camp)  
 ITALY-ROME—April 28 to June 8, 1944 (Italian Camp, Rome Sector)  
 SOUTHERN FRANCE—August 15 to November 9, 1944 (S-France Invasion & Camp)  
 FRANCE AND GERMANY—Nov. 24, 1944 to Feb. 17, 1945 (French & German Camp)  
 GERMANY—Mar. 13, 1945 to May 1, 1945 (Crossing Of Blies River)  
 (Crossing Of Rhine River) (Crossing Of Main River)  
 (Battle For Nurnberg) (Crossing Of Danube River)  
 (Battle For Munich).