



HISTORY OF THE 206TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APRIL 1943 – MAY 1945



HEADQUARTERS 206 ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APO 403, U. S. ARMY

WCT/jds

4 Dec 44

SUBJECT: After-Actions Report for Month of November 1944.

TO : Commanding General, XX Corps, APO 340, U. S. Army
Attention: Historical Division.

1 Nov 44 to 13 Nov 44:

On 31 Oct 44, this Battalion began training with the 359th Infantry Regiment, 90th Infantry Division, in infantry assault river crossings, the infantry support raft and infantry support bridge. This training was conducted at a selected site on the Moselle River in the vicinity of Pagny. Training was accomplished by Companies A, B and C consecutively, each relieving the other at the training site, receiving day and night training. This training was completed on the night of 3 Nov 44.

Following the bridge training, the companies began day and night training in ferrying operations and the use of assault boats in the bivouac area. On the night of 4 Nov 44, Col. Pirrung conducted a class for Officers of the 359th Infantry Regiment. He discussed the technical phases of an assault crossing and demonstrated the various types of boatloads designed to fit the infantry tactical organization. During the day of 5 Nov 44, at a site west of Errouville, Companies A, B, and C instructed the 3rd, 1st, and 2nd Battalions of the 359th Infantry Regiment, respectively, in the proper method of loading and carrying an assault boat. This phase of training brought together the Engineer Company Commanders and Infantry Battalion Commanders, as well as the Engineer Platoon Leaders and Infantry Company Commanders that were going to work together in the actual crossing.

A full scale dry-run assault crossing was planned for the night of 6 Nov 44 at a site northwest of Crusnes that resembled the actual crossing area insofar as possible. This maneuver was successful in only one respect; it demonstrated the necessity for much more careful planning on the part of both engineers and infantry.

7 Nov 44 was spent in preparation by this Battalion, and at 1800A¹ hrs, the Battalion, less a Headquarters detachment, left Angevillers Garrison, moved out to establish bivouac in the vicinity of Sentsich in preparation to operating with the 359th Infantry in forcing a crossing of the Moselle River in the vicinity of Malling. The area was reached at 2330 hrs after moving 13 miles by motor march in total blackout. After the move to the vicinity of Sentsich, the Battalion marched five (5) miles to an area east

¹ Indicates 1800 Greenwich Mean Time, east of the Greenwich Meridian.



of Bousse for the final dry run. Boats were not used but all signs and tracing tape were placed on specified azimuths. During the day of 8 Nov 44, final preparations and reconnaissance were made. At approximately 1800 hrs, a forward Command Post was established in the basement of a building in Gavisse and wire crews began laying wire to the assault sites. At 2330 hrs of 8 Nov 44, Companies A, B, and C moved out of the bivouac area to take up positions with the 359th Infantry Regiment to form boatloads of troops for the assault. Each assault boat crew consisted of three (3) Engineers from this Battalion as crew, and one Engineer Guide. Companies B and C of this Battalion operated 34 assault boats, and Company A maintained 16 boat crews in reserve, which were not used.

H-Hour was 0330 hrs, 9 Nov 44, with Company B ferrying the first battalion of the 359th Infantry Regiment and Company C ferrying the second battalion. The operation was completed at approximately 0415 hrs, each battalion of infantry being taken across in two (2) waves. Enemy resistance at the point of crossing was light, Company B getting one wave of infantry across before a shot was fired by the enemy. Later, at 0600 hrs, Company C ferried the 3rd Battalion across.

The assault was entirely successful as enemy forces were taken completely by surprise. Company C took 19 prisoners in the initial phases of the operation. In one instance, S/Sgt. Robert L. Harre, Platoon Sgt from McLeansboro, Ill., was paddling an assault boat along the far shore of the river, when four (4) German soldiers stood up, handed their machine gun to him and climbed into the boat with him.

At 0430, 9 Nov 44, Company A, this Battalion, with the 315th Engineer Combat Battalion, commenced construction of a foot bridge, but because of constant harassing machine gun and mortar fire, progress was slow and the attempt abandoned at about 0600 hrs. Construction of an infantry support bridge then began.

When this bridge was $\frac{3}{4}$ completed, an infantry support raft, ferrying a truck across the river, ran into and snapped the bridle lines holding the bridge. The bridge was thereby lost downstream at 1100 hrs on 9 Nov 44.

Immediately, upon the loss of the support bridge, salvage operations were started to regain some of the lost equipment. Preparations were then made to construct a treadway bridge at the same site. Construction began about 1800 hrs, 9 Nov 44, continued throughout the night and following day, and was completed about 101700 Nov 44. At 0655 hrs, 12 Nov 44, enemy artillery fire fell in the bridge area and five (5) pontoons were reported punctured, thereby weakening the bridge. Traffic was temporarily suspended while repair crews went to work patching the punctured pontoons and replacement pontoons were sent for. Traffic was shortly resumed, but at approximately 0755 additional shelling further damaged the bridge. A tank destroyer (TD) which was partially across at the time continued on across, but the bridge was weakened, and would not bear the weight of the vehicle. As the TD neared the far shore, the bridge sank into



the water at an angle so that the force of the current, combined with the weight of the vehicle, caused the bridge to break loose. This bridge was lost downstream at 0810 hrs, 12 Nov 44.

Salvage proceedings were immediately commenced, and preparations began to reconstruct the treadway bridge. Some delay was encountered in bringing up additional equipment as it was necessary to go to dumps as far away as Toul. Preparations of the abutments were commenced, however, and laying of anchor cables completed. The Battalion, less Company B, was relieved by the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion before this bridge was completed, however. Company B remained on the job, attached to the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion.

Because of the difficulty in bridging the river ferrying operations were maintained throughout the period. A ferry system was established operating three types of ferries. Infantry support rafts were operated by the 315th Engineer Combat Battalion, hauling jeeps, weapon carriers, and anti-tank guns. This ferry was instituted the morning of 9 Nov 44, was the one that knocked out the infantry support bridge, and in so doing, broke its own cable and was put out of operation.

A second type was a Class 40 ponton ferry, constructed of five (5) M-2 pontoons and treads, powered by three power boats snubbed into the raft. This ferry was operated by this Battalion and transported medium tanks and TDs. By 1700 hrs, 12 Nov 44, a company of tanks and a company of TDs were crossed. In addition, a ferry system comprised of twelve storm boats with 55-hp motors, eight assault boats joined together in groups of two (2) and powered by four 22-hp outboard motors, and two (2) power boats was operated. This system commenced on 9 Nov 44, but was extended and put in command of Capt. James M. Lee of this organization at 0800 hrs, 10 Nov 44. These boats operated almost continuously, 24 hrs per day, stopping only when it was necessary to move or extend the pier due to changing water level. Two (2) platoons, one from Company A and one (1) from Company B, were kept to maintain the pier and act as stevedores in loading and unloading the boats. These boats carried ammunition, rations, and similar stores to the far shore, and evacuated wounded, which action alone won the commendation of the Medical Officer in charge of evacuation.

About the time of the assault, the water level began to rise reaching flood stage. By the evening of the 10 Nov 44, the floodwaters had reached the edge of the town of Gavisse with a maximum-recorded depth of 55 inches on the road leading to the bridge. It was necessary, therefore, to wade 500 yds to the bridge site. The approach road to the bridge ended on an incline at the riverbank, so as to form an island at the bridge site during flood stage. For this phase of the operation, M-5 tractors were used to tow vehicles thru to the island so they could then go on across the bridge. The M-5s were also used to tow 8-ton, 16-ton, and 20-ton trailers, on which were loaded smaller vehicles and supplies, thru the water and across the bridge to unload on the other side. Two (2) cranes, one in Gavisse at the traffic control point, and one (1) across the river, were used



for the loading and unloading of the supplies. The crane across the river had been previously towed across by one of the M-5 tractors.

Bridging and ferrying operations continued during the flood stage. The water reached its crest at approximately 1200 hrs 11 Nov 44. Constant check of the water depth was made, as the movement of vehicles was dependent upon the receding of the water. The wading depth of 6-Ton Brockway trucks is 42 inches and of tanks, 30 inches. As soon as the water had reached to wading depth, the traffic control was notified as to when the vehicles could be sent thru. The bridge was completed and ready for use the evening of the 10 Nov 44; however, its use was prohibited by the flood water and it was not until the first M-5 got thru at 1500 on the 11 Nov 44 that the bridge could be utilized. Ten (10) Brockway trucks loaded with supplies and jeeps, five (5) light tanks and three (3) TDs crossed the bridge before it was lost.

The flood waters washed out parts of the approach road to the bridge, so, as the water receded, it was necessary to construct 100 ft. of hasty road. This was started about 1100 hrs, 12 Nov 44.

This Battalion, less Company B, was relieved at Malling by the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion as of 1600 hrs, 13 Nov 44, to enable the 206th to return to Angevillers to prepare to support the 10th Armored Division. Company B remained at Malling, attached to the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion, until 19 Nov 44 at which time they joined the Battalion in support of 10th Armored Division at Obernaumen.

The whole operation was conducted under the most unfavorable conditions. Throughout the period, it was rainy and cold. It was necessary to work and operate equipment in water and mud. The overflowing of the river contributed to the already bad conditions. Operations were nonetheless carried on 24 hours per day, and night activity was conducted without the benefit of any light; the nights, due to stormy weather, were very black. Though the amount of resistance in the initial assault was light in the form of machine gun and small arms fire, it was not long before artillery and mortar fire was brought to bear on the bridge site and approaches, and continued throughout the operation. The flooding of the river greatly impeded our operations in that it made it necessary to extend the ferrying distance more than double its expected distance. It also made necessary the use of valuable equipment and materials that were badly needed elsewhere and it stopped all vehicular traffic from crossing the river for almost 24 hours and slowed it up for considerably longer. In addition, it caused men, already working under the most disagreeable conditions from 14 to 24 hours without relief, to work in water from knee to waist deep.

Casualties during the operation consisted of four (4) enlisted men killed and four (4) enlisted men wounded. One (1) man drowned when a boat overturned and one (1) man was killed and one (1) wounded by enemy artillery fire on the initial assault on the



morning of 9 Nov 44. Two (2) men were killed and three (3) wounded by artillery fire on 13 Nov 44.

All types of engineer equipment and vehicles were used in the operation and drawn from all available sources during critical periods.

For this operation, the 991st Engineer Treadway Bridge Company, Company A of the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion, one (1) platoon of the 509th Engineer Light Ponton Company, and a platoon of the 161st Smoke Generating Company were attached to this organization under the command of Lt. Colonel Gilbert R. Pirrung, Commander, 206th Engineer Combat Battalion.

Despite the many difficulties encountered, the mission was accomplished. Troops, supplies, and vehicles were continuously moved across the river, bridge or no bridge, and the wounded were evacuated. That this Battalion played its part well may be concluded from the fact that the Division G-3 informally commended the Battalion to the Battalion Executive Officer for the good work done.

14 Nov 44 to 30 Nov 44:

After being relieved by the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion at Malling on 13 Nov 44, the 206th Engineer Combat Battalion, less Company B, returned to Angevillers. On the following day, 14 Nov 44, the Battalion, less Company B, left Angevillers to the vicinity of Thionville to move in support of the 10th Armored Division. On 15 Nov 44, the 206th moved across the Moselle River at Thionville in support of the 10th Armored Division; Company A moving in support of Combat Command A (CCA), and Company C in support of Combat Command B (CCB). Headquarters and Headquarters & Services Company moved in the latter column. From 15 Nov 44 to 19 Nov 44, the disposition of the Battalion's companies was as follows: Company A supporting CCA, Company C supporting CCB, and Company B attached to the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion maintaining the bridge at Malling. On 19 Nov 44, Company B was relieved from support of the 160th, and joined the Battalion at Obernaumen.

On 20 Nov 44, Companies A and B moved in support of CCA and Company C remained in support of CCB, with Headquarters and Headquarters & Service Company moving into the CCA column. This disposition remained until 30 Nov 44.

During this period in support of 10th Armored Division, the companies of the 206th swept for mines, filled craters, bridged anti-tank (AT) ditches, maintained roads, demolished pill boxes, and performed engineer tasks while moving with the task forces and combat teams of the combat commands.



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As of 301200A Nov 44, this Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 1139th Engineer Combat Group, and support of 10th Armored Division, and attached to the 95th Infantry Division for an assault operation across the Saar River at Saarlautern.

This organization first entered Germany on 21 Nov 44, when Command Post was established at Apach, in the vicinity of Perl. We again returned to France on 30 Nov 44, where we established a Command Post at Bouzonville, upon being attached to the 95th Infantry Division.

For the Commanding Officer:

WILLIAM C. TROLINGER
CWO, USA,
Assistant S-1

3 Incls:

- Incl 1: Unit Journal for Nov 44
- Incl 2: S-1 Annex
- Incl 3: Overlays