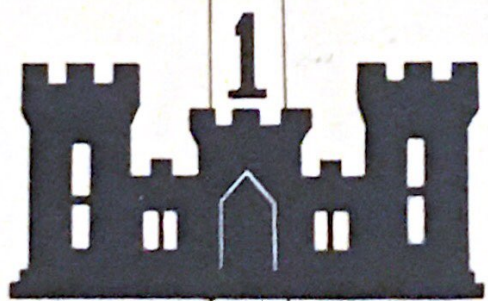


A
BRIEF
HISTORY

FIRST ENGINEER COMBAT



BATTALION

1846

1945

THE FIRST ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

1846-1945

The original engineer troops were authorized in June 1775 when Congress resolved that "There be One Chief Engineer of the Grand Army and an Engineering Department". However, they were reconstituted so many times between 1783 and 1846 that no continuous organization can be said to have existed throughout this period.

By act of 15 May 1846 Congress authorized the activation of Company A, Sappers, Miners, and Pontoniers. Although the company was not actually organized until June of the same year at West Point under Capt Alexander Swift, the 1st Engineers celebrate 15 May as Organization Day.

After the Mexican War broke out, the Company left West Point in September 1846 to join Gen Zachary Taylor's expedition. It took part in the battles of Vera Cruz, Contreras, Molino del Rey, Cerro Gordo, Churubusco, and Chapultepec. During the Mexican War the Company was continuously at the front, engaged in arduous labors—building bridges, constructing batteries, and surveying battlefields. In the fighting it was repeatedly at the head of storming parties and attacking columns. Its heroic accomplishments received highest commendation in official reports of every battle in which it participated.

When the Mexican War ended, Company A returned to West Point for the period 1848—1856 during which time it furnished a detachment to accompany the Stevens' survey of the route of the Northern Pacific Railroad. In 1858 the Company moved by foot to Utah Territory. Part remained there until the outbreak of the Civil War and the remainder returned to West Point. Early in 1861 the Company reassembled at Washington, D. C. where it served as the Presidential guard at Lincoln's inauguration.

At the close of 1861 two companies, B and C, were added and the organization became known as the US Engineer Battalion. The Battalion then moved to Yorktown where it participated in the unsuccessful Peninsular Campaign. In July

1862 Company D was organized in the Battalion which then fought as part of the Union Army opposing Lee's invasion of the North at Antietam. While in winter quarters in 1862 the Corps of Topo Engineers was merged into the Corps of Engineers. Company A, Corps of Topo Engineers became Company E of the US Engineer Battalion.

The Battalion bridged the Rappahannock River seven times, six times during the attacks on the impregnable heights of Fredericksburg and once prior to Hooker's defeat at Chancellorsville. Between four o'clock in the afternoon and midnight on 15 June 1864 it constructed a 2200 foot ponton bridge across the James River. This operation was a great feat of military engineering, rivaling the crossing of the Hellespont by Xerxes. The Battalion worked on the fortifications which invested Petersburg and was present at the surrender of Gen Lee at Appomattox in April 1865.

Throughout the Civil War the US Engineer Battalion acted as pontoniers, constructed roads, repaired fortifications, executed demolitions, and frequently served in the line as infantry. Streamers on the Battalion Standard commemorate its gallant service in the Peninsular Campaign and at Fredericksburg, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Virginia (1863), Spotsylvania, Petersburg, Wilderness, Cold Harbor, and Appomattox.

Following the Civil War and until 1898 the Battalion was stationed at various posts throughout the country. However, its home station was Willets Point N Y (now Fort Totten).

In the Spanish-American War a part of the Battalion served in Cuba and the remainder in the Philippines. By 1901 the entire Battalion was assembled in the Philippines where it was reorganized and designated the First Battalion of Engineers. The Battalion, less Company A, returned home by way of the Suez Canal thus circumnavigating the globe. Company A returned via Japan. Upon its return to the U.S. in 1901, the Battalion was stationed at Ft Leavenworth, Kansas where it remained until 1905. At this time the Philippine Insurrection broke out and for the next four years the Battalion served in the Philippines and at various stations along the west coast. From 1909 to 1916 the Battalion was garrisoned at Washington Barracks, D. C.

In July 1916 the Battalion which had just completed movement to San Antonio, Texas was reorganized and formed into a regiment, known as the First Regiment of Engineers. This organization included Regt Hq, Hq Co, Hq 1st Bn, Hq 2nd Bn, and Companies A, B, C, D, E, and F. Difficulties with Mexico arose at this time and the Regiment, based at Ft Brown and at Laredo, Texas, was used on border patrol duty.

By the outbreak of World War I, the Regiment had assembled at Washington Barracks, D.C. where it guarded the embassies of Allied Powers. The Regiment was reorganized with Companies C, D, E, and F detached to form cadres for the 6th and 7th Engineers. With Companies A and B as its nucleus the 1st Engineer Regiment was then recruited to full officer and enlisted strength.

On 7 August 1917 the 1st Engineers sailed aboard the USAT Finland and debarked at St Nazaire, France on 20 August. The Regiment moved on the famous "40 and 8" trains to Monacourt where for the first time the 1st Engineer Regiment joined and became part of the 1st Infantry Division. The Regiment saw action in the Cantigny, Soissons, and Saiserais sectors. During the reduction of the St Mihiel sector by the 1st Division, the Engineers performed normal engineer missions. In the attack by the Division east of the Argonne and west of the Meuse the 1st Battalion, 1st Engineers successfully captured and defended Hill 269. For this action they were cited by V Corps.

The French cited the 1st Engineers for their part in the Cantigny and Manil-la-Tour sectors and again for their part in the Soissons sector. In recognition the Regiment wears the fourragere in the colors of the Croix de Guerre (green and red).

The Regiment marched to the Rhine River shortly after the Armistice where it formed part of the security detachment at Coblenz, Germany. While at this post it bridged the Rhine in the record time of 42 minutes.

During the summer of 1919 the Regiment, less Company A, returned to the United States. Shortly afterwards Companies B and D returned to Germany. In 1922 the Regiment finally settled in permanent station at Ft DuPont, Del. where it was joined by Companies A, B, and D upon their

return from Coblenz, Germany. The years between 1922 and 1939 were spent in training and garrison duties. In 1928 Company D was sent to Vermont to replace a washed out bridge and in the following year a provisional battalion with Company A as the nucleus was formed for the purpose of surveying a proposed canal across Nicaragua. The 1st Engineers participated in the First Army Maneuvers in 1935 and again in 1939.

In October 1939 the 1st Engineers underwent the most sweeping reorganization in its history. The 1st Battalion was redesignated the 1st Engineer Battalion (Combat) and the 2nd Battalion was redesignated the 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat). The Regimental Hq and H & S Company were disbanded and the officers and men cadred for the 70th Engr Co (LP) and H & S Co, 18th Engineers. The 1st Engr Bn (C) consisted of Hq Detach (now H & S Co) and Companies A, B, and C.

In January 1941 the Battalion joined the 1st Division which reassembled at Ft Devens, Mass. During 1941 it trained with the 1st Division in amphibious exercises at New River, N.C. and Virginia Beach, Va. and participated in the First Army Maneuvers in N.C. In February 1942 the Battalion moved by motor convoy with the 1st Division to Camp Blanding, Florida where it trained in swamp and jungle warfare. In May 1942 the Battalion moved to Ft Benning, Ga. where it took part in a coordinated air-ground maneuver. In June 1942 the Battalion loaded the Division's transportation for rail movement to Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Pa. where the Division was staged for overseas movement.

The entire Division left New York on 2 August 1942 aboard HMS Queen Mary and arrived in Grennock, Scotland on 7 August 1942. The Battalion moved by rail to Tidworth Barracks, Hants, England. Here it was reequipped and brought up to full strength. During September 1942 Companies A, B, and C joined their respective Combat Teams for amphibious maneuvers in Scotland.

On 22 October the Division left the United Kingdom for the African Invasion. The Engineers' first action in World War II was in the assault landing in the vicinity of Oran, Algeria on 8 November 1942. On 11 November the city was captured and the Algerian Campaign ended. The Battalion moved to Oggaz where it began training for further combat.

At this time the armored vehicles and heavy weapons were pooled to form a provisional Company D. In mid-December 1942 one platoon of Company B joined Combat Team 18 and moved to the vicinity of Medjez-el-Bab where it supported CT 18 which was attached to the 1st British Army. On 17 January 1943 the Battalion, less Company C which had departed a week earlier with CT 26, left Oggaz by motor convoy for the Tunisian front and arrived in the forward area near Maktar on 29 January. The unit took part in the Ousseltia Valley campaign until 20 February when it moved to southern Tunisia with CT 16 to stop the German breakthrough at Kasserine Pass. In coordination with CT 16 it assisted in the counter-attack which succeeded in retaking Kasserine Pass. Following this action the Battalion moved to Djebel Bou Khadra where the 1st Division reassembled. On 8 March the 1st Engineers moved south to Feriana. From 8 to 16 March the unit performed engineer work in preparation for the attack on Gafsa. So well did the Battalion execute its extremely difficult mission that it was awarded its first Presidential Citation.

After the capture of Gafsa the Battalion advanced to El Guettar. Here Companies B and C were attached to CTs 18 and 26 when they repelled the strong attack of the entire German 10th Panzer Division.

On 18 April the Battalion moved to the Beja-Mateur sector where it performed extensive mine, road, and bridge work in addition to several infantry missions. The Tunisian Campaign ended on 9 May 1943 and for its distinguished actions in this campaign the Battalion was awarded its second Presidential Citation.

On 12 May 1943 the Battalion moved by motor convoy to Sidi Chami, near Oran, Algeria where it underwent further amphibious training for the assault on Sicily. At this time Company D was disbanded.

On 10 July 1943 the 1st Engineers took part in the assault landing near Gela, Sicily. During the short but extremely active Sicilian campaign the Battalion repaired or by-passed 39 bridges and 26 giant craters, removed many mines, and maintained Divisional MSRs. At the close of the campaign on 18 August the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Licata where it underwent further training. On 22 October 1943 the Engineers embarked at Augusta, Sicily aboard

the Sterling Castle. After transshipping to HMS Franconia at Algiers the Battalion debarked at Liverpool, England on 7 November. During this period in England Companies were located in the vicinity of their respective Combat Teams, Company A at Charmouth, Company B at Corfe Castle, Company C at Studland, and Battalion Headquarters and H & S Company near Blandford.

In southern England the 1st Engineers trained strenuously for their part in the invasion of Fortress Europe. In preparation for the assault, companies attended special courses at the Assault Training School at Woolacombe. Later the Battalion participated in two amphibious rehearsals at Slapton Sands.

Shortly after H hour on 6 June 1944 the Battalion landed amid concentrated mortar, artillery, anti-tank, and small arms fire upon the fortified shores of Normandy in the vicinity of St Laurent-Sur-Mer, France. Elements of the Battalion cleared personnel lanes through the dense minefields and barbed wire to allow the infantry to advance inland. By H plus 8 hours the Engineers had succeeded in opening an exit road into a vehicle transit area inland through many obstacles including a 20 ft anti-tank ditch. This was the only beach exit road opened on D day. Supporting the advance to Caumont, France the Battalion cleared mines and removed obstacles from the roads. For its heroic action in the landing and subsequent rapid dash into Caumont, the Battalion was awarded its third Presidential Citation. After relief at Caumont on 14 July the 1st Engineers moved to an assembly area northwest of St Lo to reequip and prepare for the scheduled breakthrough. On 25 July the Battalion went back into action with the 1st Infantry Division and assisted in the St Lo breakthrough and exploitation. Clearing roads, building bridges, and occasionally performing security missions, the Battalion advanced rapidly in pursuit of the enemy across France and Belgium. After the decisive defeat of the Wehrmacht in the famous Mons Battle, the Battalion continued into Germany where it aided in breaching the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Aachen, Germany on 12 September 1944. The Engineers cleared gaps through the dragon's teeth and destroyed pillboxes. During the envelopment and siege of Aachen the 1st Engineers engaged in every phase of combat engineering — laying mines, clearing debris and obstacles

from roads, building roads, blasting passages through walls and houses during the street fighting, and occupying defensive positions. After the fall of Aachen on 21 October 1944 the Battalion participated in the bitter fighting in the Hurtgen Forest — the most difficult and costly of the war for the 1st Division. Bad weather and poor roads required extensive pioneer work, much of which was done under heavy artillery fire. The 1st Division was relieved on 6 December 1944 and the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Aachen for rest and reequipping.

On 16 December 1944 when the Germans broke through the American lines in the Ardennes, the 1st Division rushed to the threatened area to contain the penetration. The Battalion moved to Sourbrodt, Belgium. Company B took up defensive positions in Weismes, Belgium until relieved by Combat Team 16. While the Division held the northern shoulder of the bulge, the Battalion laid an extensive minefield of over 30,000 mines, believed to be the largest continuous minefield ever laid by any US engineer unit. It played a vital part in thwarting the enemy's plans to break through in this sector. On 15 January 1945 the 1st Division began an offensive which culminated in its second breaching of the Siegfried Line, this time in the vicinity of Hollerath, Germany on 2 February 1945. Because of heavy snow and rain, road clearance and maintenance were of major importance throughout this operation. In the attack on the Siegfried Line the Engineers again performed their hazardous assault missions of blasting lanes through the dense minefields and fortifications.

On 9 February 1945 the Battalion moved north to the Hurtgen sector. The Roer River crossing was postponed when the enemy flooded the valley by destroying the control dams. As a result the extremely poor roads required continuous maintenance. On 25 February 1945 the 1st Engineers crossed the Roer in support of the 1st Division. In the rapid advance to the Rhine, the companies removed numerous road blocks and mines and built many bridges. The Battalion worked in close support of the infantry in the swift, masterful capture of Bonn, Germany which fell on 10 March 1945. The Battalion crossed the Rhine River in the vicinity of Remagen on 15 March 1945 where it supported the Division in expanding the bridgehead. On 24 March 1945 the Division attacked out of the bridgehead. After a spectacular dash of

160 miles the First closed the Ruhr pocket when it joined up with elements of the US 9th Army in the vicinity of Paderborn on 3 April 1945. The Division then drove eastward to the Weser River where the Battalion conducted an assault crossing of two regiments on 7—8 April 1945.

In the rapid advance into the Harz mountains the Engineers worked side by side with the infantry, clearing mined abatis and other heavily defended road blocks. After all resistance in the Harz mountains had collapsed, the US 1st Army contacted elements of the Russian Army near the Elbe River. On 28 April 1945 the 1st Engineers made a long motor move to the vicinity of Hof, Germany near the Czechoslovakian border to join the US 3rd Army. In close support of the 1st Infantry Division the Battalion crossed the Czechoslovakian border against light opposition on 30 April 1945. At the cessation of hostilities in Europe the 1st Engineer Combat Battalion was located at Frant Lazne, Czechoslovakia where it assisted the Division in assembling the many thousands of German troops that had surrendered. Construction of a prisoner of war enclosure that measured 10 miles in perimeter was the last major engineer mission that the Battalion completed as the war against Germany ended.

BATTLE STREAMERS

CIVIL WAR:

1. Peninsula
2. Fredericksburg
3. Antietam
4. Chancellorsville
5. Virginia, 1863
6. Spotsylvania
7. Petersburg
8. Wilderness
9. Cold Harbor
10. Appomattox

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR:

1. Santiago

PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION:

1. (Streamer without inscription)

WORLD WAR I:

1. Lorraine
2. Montdidier-Noyon
3. St. Mihiel
4. Picardy
5. Aisne-Marne
6. Meuse-Argonne
7. Lorraine (French award of Croix de Guerre)
8. Picardy " " " " " "
9. Aisne-Marne " " " " " "
10. Meuse-Argonne " " " " " "

WORLD WAR II:

1. French Morocco-Algeria
2. Tunisia
3. Sicily
4. Normandy
5. Northern France
6. Rhineland
7. Ardennes
8. Central Europe
9. Gafsa (Presidential Citation)
10. Tunisia „ ”
11. Normandy „ ”

SILVER GUIDON BANDS

MEXICAN WAR:

1. Vera Cruz (Company A)
2. Contreras „
3. Molino del Rey „
4. Cerro Gordo „
5. Churubusco „
6. Chapultepec „

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR:

1. Manila (Company A)

PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION:

1. Manila (Company A)
2. Cavite „
3. Tarlac (Company B)

BATTLE CASUALTIES

WORLD WAR I

28 Officers — 789 Enlisted Men

ALGERIA

0 Officers — 4 Enlisted Men

TUNISIA

7 Officers — 73 Enlisted Men

SICILY

7 Officers — 42 Enlisted Men

FRANCE

9 Officers — 90 Enlisted Men

BELGIUM

3 Officers — 51 Enlisted Men

GERMANY

12 Officers — 165 Enlisted Men

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

0 Officers — 2 Enlisted Men

HISTORY OF THE COAT OF ARMS FOR THE FIRST ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

Sable, in fess an anchor bearing two oars in saltire, between two increscents all argent. As an augmentation on a chief intended of the last a band between a lion rampant in chief and a fleur-de-lis in base all gules. Pendant from escutcheon a French croix de guerre with gilt star proper.

CREST. On a wreath of the colors, the officers' cap ornament of the Corps of Engineers as specified in Article 83, of the Regulations of 1841, proper (gold wreath of laurel on dexter side, palm on sinister, enclosing a silver turretted castle), with the numeral "1" or above centre turret.

DESCRIPTION:

(a) The battalion has a continuous history from 1846 when Company "A" was organized. At that time, the color of the facings of the Corps of Engineers was black which has therefore been taken as the color of the field of the shield. The officers' cap device of that period is used as the crest. The Civil War is shown by the principal part of the badge of the Engineers and Pontoniers of the Army of the Potomac, an anchor behind two crossed oars in silver. The two crescents were taken from the arms of General Winfield Scott and show the service of Company "A" under that General in Mexico.

(b) The chief is an augmentation of honor for World War I in which the battalion participated as a part of the 1st Division being cited by the French for distinguished services rendered at Manil-la-Tour, Cantigny and Soissons. The croix de guerre with which the colors are decorated is shown as a pendant to the shield. The band on the chief is taken from the arms of Lorraine where Manil-la-Tour is situated. Cantigny is in Picardy and the lion is taken from the arms of the province, while the fleur-de-lis is from the arms of Soissons. The colors of the chief are the present colors of the Corps of Engineers and the indented partition line shows the connection of the battalion with intrenchments during the first World War.

