HEADWARTERS
1253D ENGINEER COMBAT BATIALION

APO 168, c/o Postmaster New York, New York
12 January 1945

SUBJECT; Records

TO : The Adjutant General, Washington 25, D.C.

In compliance with paragraph lib AR 345-105, dated 18 November 1929, forwarded herewith duplicate historical record copy 1253d Engineer Combat Battalion and covers the period since activation, 15 December 1943, to 31 December 1944.

For the Commanding Officer:

KARL P.
MCCANN
C W O U S A

cl:
Duplicate copy History
Record 1253d Engr C Bn

FOREWORD

This is the tenth day of October 1944, and this is the date that the history record of the 1253d Engineer Combat Battalion was initiated into print. Inasmuch as the battalion was activated 15 December 1943, it is deemed both fitting and proper that certain information be placed in this forward. The battalion was activated per Section 2, General Order 33, Headquarters, Fourth Army, dated 10 December 1943. The activation and first post of the 1253d Engineer Combat Battalion was Camp Cooke, California. The battalion was placed under the command of Major Porter L. Gillespie who remained in command through most of the turbulent training period. On 26 May 1944 this organization was transferred to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. On 5 July 1944 Major Charles R. Pfeffer was assigned and assumed command.

It is hoped that the following pages will prove of interest to those who read the history of this battalion--a history which it is hoped will be to the glory of the great United States of America.

C H A P T E R I

The 1253d Engineer Combat Battalion was ordered from Camp Livingston to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and we moved by rail on 14 October 1944.

Our strength was twenty-nine officers, three warrant officers, and six hundred and six enlisted men. At Camp Kilmer we spent five days being processed for service overseas and departed from there 21 October 1944 with strength of twenty-nine officers, three warrant officers, and six hundred and two enlisted men. The battalion lost seven enlisted men at the staging area: three enlisted men were dropped from the rolls by reason of absence without official leave, and four enlisted men were dropped by reason of hospitalization. We received three enlisted men as replacements.

The battalion departed from the New York Port of Embarkation on the British transport Tamaroa on 22 October 1944 for in the European Theater of Operations. We disembarked 3 November 1944 at Avonmouth, England and moved by rail to Totnes, England.

At present we are operating a Bailey Bridge School in Syon-Abbey, England, and have been highly commended for efficient operation thereof.

Pursuant to secret orders the battalion was moved from Totnes, England, to France on 2 March 1945. The battalion came over with the following strength: 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 575 enlisted men. In France we moved to Camp 20 Grand near Du Clair. The major problem upon arrival was supply.

The battalion moved from Camp 20 Grand near Du Clair, France, 14 March 1945 enroute to and arrived at Erkelenz, Germany, 15 March 1945. Strength of the battalion was 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, 571 enlisted men. Battalion moved from Erkelenz, Germany, to Herongen, Germany, l6 March 1945 with no change in strength, after having been attached to the 1117th Engineer Combat Group on 15 March 1945. At a Group conference 0900 17 March 1945 the battalion commander was

briefed relative to the coming Rhine operations. The battalion commander was given the responsibility of construction and maintenance of all approach roads for bridges to be constructed relative to the Ninth United States Army's crossing of the Rhine. In addition two companies were to be attached to the 551st Heavy Pontoon Battalion to assist in the construction of one of the bridges which was to be a heavy pontoon bridge. A suggested plan for access roads to proposed bridge sites was furnished and orders issued for necessary reconnaissance. The operation was designated as Target Operation and refers to the Area on the west bank of the Rhine in the vicinity of Buederich, Germany. The bridges referred to above were to be built across the Rhine River in the vicinity of Buederich, Germany, on the west side and Wesel, Germany, on the east side.

Captain Blue Anderson and First Lieutenant Du Roc J. Batte departed for reconnaissance of Target area 1000 17 March 1945, returned with results 1800 17 March 1945, after being subjected to intermittent artillery shelling. These two officers immediately started work on proposed plan for access roads.

Company "A" was selected for construction and maintenance of access roads; Companies "B" and "C" were selected for construction of the heavy pontoon bridge. Training in both these phases was started immediately.

At H plus 18 minesweeping crews totaling 30 men, drawn from Headquarters and Service Company, and an 8-man detail from Company "A" for loosening rails arrived at the Target area. Intermittent artillery and mortar fire and one strafing attack by an enemy plane slowed down this phase of the operation; however by 0900 25 March 1945, the rails were completely loosened and enough roads swept of mines to permit operations to begin.

The battalion less two companies arrived at 1130 25 March 1945(X hour, C Day for the Engineer Operation). Almost simultaneously with arrival of the unit began rather intense harassing artillery fire from the enemy on the far shore; however, work was started and continued in the face of the fire which continued sporadically throughout the afternoon until approximately 1800 when apparently all enemy installations were silenced. During this time we suffered one casualty to personnel: Pvt. Willard E. Tillmann, 37 584 847, slightly wounded in action.

Upon arrival of the unit, 34 truck loads of material for expedient road arrived and was spotted as required; at the same time dozing the RR tracks from the road bed was begun. At X plus 5 road to bridge site No. 1 was complete except for surfacing with slag which was progressing at X plus 10; the same was true at bridge site No. 3. And at X plus 8 the 1100 yards of new road had been pushed through and was being graveled with ballast taken from the RR.

Concurrent with these operations, approach roads were widened to permit two-way traffic.

By X plus 28 all three expedient roads were complete, 1100 yards of new road, and 1200 yards of existing lanes converted into two-lane roads. It was then a matter of continuous maintenance.

The battalion was under the command of Major Charles R. Pfeffer and had an active strength of 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 616 enlisted men. The operations of the battalion were successful, and the battalion was released from this assignment after completing its mission on 28 March 1945. Neither the battalion commander nor the company commanders desired to cite any one individual as being outstanding; however, they did wish to state that the battalion and the companies as a whole performed admirably. This was the first action in which the battalion was under fire. The battalion strength at the close of the operations was 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 615 enlisted men.

The battalion with all companies thereof changed station from Herongen, Germany, to Buederich, Germany, and was detached from the 1117th Engineer Combat Group and attached to the 1148th Engineer Combat Group. Engineer operations consisted of routine road maintenance and repair maintenance of bailey and treadway bridges across the Rhine River in the vicinity of Wallach, Germany. Plans were made to replace a single Bailey bridge one mile southwest of Buederich with a two-way Class 40 timber trestle bridge. Site of construction was at demolished concrete bridge over a small stream; the project entailed difficulty in that debris from the demolished span laid directly on the proposed centerline of the timber bridge approximately ten feet under the water. It was decided to make a

partial earth and stone fill four feet above the flow line of the water, installing two 36 inch culverts to accommodate the flow of the stream and on top of this to construct a timber trestle bridge with steel "T" beam stringers, bridge was to be approximately 70 feet in length and 12 feet above the fill. Work was begun on the fill but was halted after one day's operation because of the battalion's move forward.

On 31 March 1945, Company B was given the task of removing "G" bridge, which was a treadway bridge, across the Rhine in the vicinity of Wallach, Germany. The job was to be completed in approximately two days. It was completed 1300, 2 April 1945 with no unusual difficulties encountered. On 2 April 1945 Company A was given the mission of removing "H" bridge, which was a heavy pontoon bridge, across the Rhine in the vicinity of Wallach, Germany, and completed same 1200, 3 April 1945.

On 3 April 1945 the battalion moved to Sythen, Germany, with an assigned strength of 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 616 enlisted men. Operations at Sythen consisted of maintenance and repair of MSR's, sweeping MSR's for mines to a distance of 20 feet on either side of the road, and routine road and bridge reconnaissance. Special tasks consisted of constructing two timber bridges, one over the Lippe River to replace one demolished concrete arch of a three span concrete arch bridge, the other a demolished steel truss bridge over the Lippe Canal; rebuilding roads at the 105th Evacuation Hospital. The site for this hospital had been poorly chosen in that it was very low and could not be drained. Following much rain, roads were impassable and the entrances were covered with a foot to a foot and a half of mud and water. This was remedied by raising the road bed with rocks, covering with corduroy, and in turn covering this with small stones.

The bridge across the Lippe River was 108 feet long, 3 spans at 30 feet and on span at 18 feet. One of the bridges was resting upon the ground; the other had as its abutment, the end of the undemolished portion of the concrete arch bridge. There remained of the original bridge a projecting portion of the demolished arch; this was braced by timber bents, and no weight from the timber bridge was allowed to rest upon this damaged portion. Prior to beginning construction, it was necessary to remove several unexploded demolition charges; these charges were approximately 240mm artillery shells and 500 pound

aerial bombs, all primed with pound block TNT. This bridge construction was done by Co. C and was completed in eight days, using one quick *way* and one crawler crane in addition to organic battalion equipment. Captured enemy generators and flood lights provided necessary night illumination.

Company A was given the task of constructing the bridge across the Lippe Canal. This bridge was unusual in that it was decided to construct the bridge directly over the demolished steel span which was broken in half allowing its center to rest in the canal and its ends on their original abutments. This entailed somewhat of a "custom built" bridge, and difficulty was experienced prior to its completion because the demolished structure began to settle unevenly. This was remedied by construction of timber cribs underneath the demolished span to give it additional support. The task was made much easier due to the fact that water from the canal was diverted into the Lippe River leaving only some two or three feet water remaining in the Canal. When the canal was drained there were four dead German soldiers found in the water at the bridge site. This job was completed in nine days.

Another special job was the creation of a by-pass in Dulmen, Germany, so as to alleviate traffic bottlenecks. At Dulmen four MSR's made a junction in the center of the town and since the town was nothing but a mass of rubble, it was almost impassable to large volumes of traffic. Company B was given the mission to investigate, make recommendations, and complete the project. The solution was the creation of one way by-passes around the town which involved filling of many bomb craters, clearing of rubble, and posting adequate signs. This was further improved by the construction of a two-way street through the center of town connecting to MSR′s. This entailed the movement of a great amount of rubble, filling cellars of damaged homes, bomb craters, demolishing the remains *of* partially destroyed buildings, leveling and adding a wearing surface for traffic. During operations several civilians who were victims of the bombings were uncovered and turned over to the AMG for disposal. This task was completed in five days, provided an excellent route for traffic, thus greatly relieving the traffic situation which was urgently needed due the vast amount of traffic then moving up to take part in the Ninth Army's drive encircling the Ruhr Valley.

Another special task which was accomplished by Company B was the opening of streets and a route into town at Hamm, Germany. Access to Hamm had been practically denied to vehicular traffic because of enemy demolition of all highway bridges across the Lippe Seiten Canal. Restricted amounts of traffic had been using the undamaged railway bridge after the hasty construction of a roadway by dozing one track off the bridge. This was widened by removal of another track, and access to the bridges was improved by construction of two one-way access roads. *Very* little work was required inside the city, as not much debris was present in the streets. It was necessary to fill in a number of bomb craters and widen the streets in certain critical points. This project was completed in four days.

On 13 April 1945 this battalion, less Companies A and B moved to Hameln, Germany, with an assigned strength of 28 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 610 enlisted men, were joined on 14 April 1945 by Company B and on 15 April 1945 by Company A. Company C was given the job of maintaining a Heavy Pontoon Bridge across the Weser at Hameln, Germany, and a floating bailey bridge at Grohnde. Company B cleared the Luftwaffe kasserne at Brunswick of mines and booby traps in preparation for occupancy by Ninth Army headquarters. Several demolition charges and booby traps were removed, and no particular difficulties were encountered. Company B dismantled and transported a distance of approximately twenty miles, a floating bailey bridge across the Weser and re-constructed same at Hameln, thus providing two one-way bridges at Hameln.

Approximately one mile of road was resurfaced with water-bound macadam in the vicinity of Koppenbrugge by Company A. The battalion was given the task of bridging two gaps on the Autobahn twenty miles north of Hameln and the task was in turn assigned to Company A. After studying the problem it was decided to fill the gaps rather than try to bridge them. The gaps were the result of German demolition which had partially destroyed concrete masonry bridges, and were approximately 90 feet in width and 60 feet in depth. The site was ideal for the method chosen. It was estimated that 50,000 cubic yards would be required to complete each job. The battalion employed 17 tractors, 7 carry-all scrapers, two sheeps' feet rollers and was assisted by an engineer maintenance platoon furnished by Army headquarters. Despite the fact that work was hampered by heavy intermittent rains and snow Company A averaged

moving 4,000 to 7,000 yards daily. At the time the job was better than 50% complete it was halted because of the fact that American troops *were* moving from the area which was later to be occupied by the British. It had been decided that the method chosen by us was the best solution to the problem and since there were such bridges there was not enough equipment to have completed them all.

The battalion was given the additional task of constructing a crib pier timber trestle, one-way Class 70, 2-way Class 40, 220 foot bridge across the Weser to replace the two floating bridges. The pile bridge was not believed feasible due to rock strata near the surface of the ground and since very little work had been done on crib bridges, it was decided to make this something of an experimental bridge. This battalion designed a bridge utilizing cribs constructed of a framework of steel I and channel beams lined with pierced plank to be placed in the river and then filled with the rock. Over these cribs was to be built a standard timber trestle bridge. Plans were drawn, work was started by Company B, later assisted by Company A, and continued until we were relieved prior to our moving back to Moers. At this time the bridge was 40% complete. Lumber for project was obtained by operating four saw-mills within a 20 mile radius of the bridge site. Supplies in general were critical, being very difficult to locate and obtain. Other work at Hameln consisted of construction of an anti-mine boom across the river to protect the floating bridges, construction of access roads to both the floating bridge and fixed bridges by Company C, and routine maintenance of MSR's. The battalion located a large German engineer dump which had been used in their floating bridge training. During Our stay at Hameln we employed an average of 100 German civilians daily.

The battalion moved to Moers, Germany, 5 May 1945, with an assigned strength of 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 594 enlisted men and were assigned to Fifteenth Army and attached to ADSEC Com Z for the purpose of constructing a 100,000 PW cage in the vicinity of Moers. This proposed cage was cancelled and the battalion was given the task of working in conjunction with the 284th Combat Engineers in building the 100,000 PW cage at Wickrathburg. During this time the battalion moved to Odenkirchen with an assigned strength of 29 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 591 enlisted men, to re-work and repair the 50,000 PW cage at Buederich. During

the work on the PW cages at least, 1,000 PW's were employed daily. Upon completion of this the battalion was attached to the 1157th Engineer Combat Group and moved to Duisburg (Wedau) with an assigned strength of 27 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 594 enlisted men, and there engaged in locating, hauling, and shipping engineer materials out of the assigned areas to various points of France and Belgium. During the month so engaged a total of 599 cars were loaded and shipped. The single largest item shipped was 4,878,000 board feet of lumber. An average of 79 German civilians were employed daily. During our stay in Duisburg, Lt. Col. CHARLES R. PFEFFER and Captain Blue Anderson were awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service in connection with the crossing of the Rhine.

On 20 June 1945 the battalion moved to Saarburg, Germany, with an a assigned strength of 28 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 605 enlisted men and was attached to the 1106th Engineer Combat Group and in this area they operated eight saw-mills, hauled the lumber to engineer rail-heads at Tier, maintained approximately 120 miles of road with the aid of German civilian contractors, and performed various small odd jobs for the Military Government. Operations ceased 28 June 1945 when the battalion was alerted for direct redeployment. All companies were assembled in Trier, 1 July 1945, to make preparations and the battalion moved as a unit arriving at Calais Staging Area No. 1, France, on 15 July 1945.

Upon arrival in Calais Staging Area the battalion continued preparations for overseas movement. On or about 25 August 1945 the unit was notified it was no longer scheduled for direct redeployment to the Pacific Theater and upon VOCG, Delta Base Section, on 27 August 1945 the battalion less Company "B" moved from Calais Staging Area No. 1, France to the vicinity of Calais, France (Map Coor 4234) with an assigned strength of 24 Officers, 3 Warrant Officers, and 443 Enlisted men. Company "B" with a strength of 5 Officers and 162 Enlisted Men moved to Nice, France for duty with the Riviera District Engineer. The Battalion was attached to the 1156 Engineer Combat Group on 27 August 1945 for operations. On 19 September 1945 Company “B" with an assigned strength of 5 Officers and 162 Enlisted Men rejoined the Battalion in the vicinity of Calais, France.

Construction of concrete lined pit latrines was begun by the

battalion in Calais Staging Area on 27 August 1945 and completed 17 December 1945. During the period a total of 329 latrines were constructed expending 29,112 man hours of enlisted labor and 113,140 man hours of POW labor. An average of 150 POW's were employed on this project each day.

A box factory in Calais Staging Area was operated by the battalion from 29 October 1945 to 11 January 1946 which made latrine shelters, latrine boxes, and dog kennels. 4760 man hours of enlisted men labor and 36,000 man hours of POW labor were expended on this project.

Twenty prefabricated buildings were erected for use as theaters in the Calais Staging Area from 30 October 1945 to 15 November 1945. Labor expended amounted to 2872 man hours of enlisted labor and 18,680 man hours of POW labor.

Winterization of Galas Staging was begun 10 September 1945 and completed 5 November 1945. The work consisted of framing and flooring of both squad and pyramidal tents. At the same time two lumber stockpiles were operated by the battalion. A total of 7,366,416 board feet *of* lumber was hauled. On this job 10,624 man hours of enlisted labor was expended and 97,720 hours of POW labor.

Construction of the Calais Theater "MAY-GET-IN", a Butler portable hangar, was begun 27 August and completed 25 October 1945. When finished, the theater had 35,360 square feet of floor space and a seating capacity of 4000. Labor expended was estimated at 8475 man hours of enlisted labor and 70,398 man hours of POW labor. 82,000 board feet of lumber were used in construction.

During the period from August 1945 to January 1946, the battalion area was improved by the construction of dayrooms, mess halls, and walks throughout the area. Recreational facilities were developed to a high degree.

On 19 October 1945 Lt Col Charles R. Pfeffer was transferred and Major Frederic M. Hewitt assumed command of the battalion. On 9 January 1946 Captain Dickie Ivens assumed command.

On 23 January 1946, the battalion, less company “B” and Company "C" departed from the vicinity of Calais, France and moved

to Marigane, France (Coor T3328) with an assigned strength of 17 Officers and 181 Enlisted Men. Company "B" with a strength of 4 Officers and 84 Enlisted Men remained in the old area and was assigned to task of tearing down the camp. Company "C" with an assigned strength of 3 Officers and 146 Enlisted Men departed for St. Raphael, France on 23 January 1946 to take charge of lumber mills in the vicinity and all water supply installations in Delta Base Section. Company "A" was installed in Depot E-521 and was occupied with routine tasks and removal of gasoline pipeline.

On 26 January 1946 Lt. Col. Maurice J Morley assumed command of the battalion.

At the date of this writing, 4 February 1946, the battalion has been scheduled for inactivation an all enlisted personnel have been transferred - EDCMR 5 February 1946.

The mission of the battalion was the operation of Engineer CRP#2. This depot was originally set up to clean, repair and process Engineer equipment for shipment to CBI. The end of the war in Japan found CRP#2 Flooded with Engineer equipment. All equipment was processed for outdoor storage and segregated into storage areas by type.

On 20 February 1946 the battalion, less personnel and equipment was moved from Calais, France to Chievres, Belgium. This move constituted a permanent change of station.

At Chievres, Belgium the battalion was again assigned personnel and on 5 March 1946 its strength was 9 Officers and 279 enlisted men.

Lt. Col, John T. Poffenberger assumed command on 5 March 1946.

At present Engineer CRP 2 is being used as a surplus Property disposal center and the principal mission of the battalion is to guard, display, repair and store the equipment. The battalion is functioning with enlisted men in only two companies "A" and “B”.

Separate missions are not assigned the companies but rather all officers and enlisted men are in a battalion pool and in that manner operated.

Redeployment is constantly removing persons and occasionally

replacements arrive from the US.

On 5 June 1946 the strength of the battalion was 18 officers and 158 enlisted men. The battalion is assigned to the Engineer Section, Western Base Section, Paris, France.

During the Month of July 1946 the mission of the Battalion was the entire operation of Engineer Depot ECRP #2.

During the Month approximately 1100 POW's were transferred to a central enclosure for further disposition. The balance of the 1400 POW's are still engaged in repair, care and loading of equipment.

The average Battalion strength for July was 11 Officers and replacements brought the EM strength up to 379 at the end of the Month.

Approximately 329 wagons of Engineer equipment were outloaded to various places in Europe and to the USA during the Month.

The main problem was guarding the installation against pilferage.

During the period from 1 August to 31 August 1946 the Depot was visited by a party from the Office of Foreign Liquidation Commission for Europe. Conferences were held between the Depot Commander, the inspecting Party, and Belgian Government Officials with the aim in view to set up a procedure for expeditiously clearing up all surplus property depots in Belgium.

The Depot was inspecting during the Month by teams from the following Headquarters:

(A) Western Base Section, Inspector Generals Dept.

(B) 13th Major Port, Inspector Generals Dept.

(C) 13th Major Port, Fire Marshal Office.

The average Battalion strength is 9 Officers, 8 WD Civilians, and 450 Enlisted Men who outloaded approximately 203 railway wagons of surplus property and scrap shipments.