

163rd Engineer Combat Battalion
May 1943 - Aug 1945
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This is the life story of "Able" Company, 163rd Engineer Combat Battalion. It is a story that is still being written, for victory is yet to be won with Nippon.

If you were to say that, let us call her "she" for brevity, she was typical of hundreds of other Combat Engineers in this war, there would be a mighty roar of derision, for every man in the outfit feels that they are in the best Engineer Company in this Theater. That may or may not be - - there can be no ultimate judge - - but let me tell you why they think they are the best. It's a long story - - for it ranges from the torrid sun of Mississippi to the bitter cold of Alsace - - but here are the facts:

"Able" first saw the light of day May 5th, 1943, which day marked the activation of the 163rd ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. She was inaugurated under the command of 2nd Lieutenant William F. Garrity, Jr. There followed the usual adjustment and orientation of the new men by the cadre: Sgt. Monroe A Drosche, Cpl. Maury F. Loftis, Cpl. Pierce W. Allen, S/Sgt. Richard H. Bose, Jr., in charge of supply, S/Sgt George J. Lasky as First Sergeant, T/4 John D. Presson on DS (detached service) as Mess Sergeant. Between the date of activation May 5th and the start of actual training June 1st, men were continually being assigned to the Company and being allotted to the Platoons.

These men were as motley a group as was ever assembled. There were men from Mississippi, from Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, Kentucky, Virginia, the Carolinas, to be later joined by men from Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Washington and California, Michigan, and New Hampshire. Preponderantly draftees, but interspersed with regular army men.

May 29th witnessed the arrival of the officers to be under the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Garrity. They were Lieutenants Harry F. Allen, Jr., Leland H. Bishop, Arthur B. Cadwalader, and Mark F. Gardner.

Basic Training began June 1st. Engineer (Combat) training is reputed to be as tough as any ever devised. Add a dash of Mississippi sun, and raw recruits in poor physical shape, and you have a full dispensary at all times - - which indeed it was. There were continuing additions of men as Basic progressed. As the training advanced, the new additions were placed in a class under the instruction of Lieutenant Bishop. This intensified training enabled them to continue training on a progressive par with the rest of the Company.

No member of this group will ever forget Basic Training. It was a nightmare of night problems, calisthenics, close order drill, bridges, intense heat, those grueling hikes - - 5 miles in 60 minutes, more often done in 55 minutes or less, the bivouacs at Dixie Springs, pontoon bridges there and on the Red River in Louisiana, mail call twice daily with T/5 John T. Powell, mail clerk, presiding, the classes under the Big Oak out in the V-3 training area, classes by Lieutenants Bishop, Allen, and Cadwalader, those Saturday inspections by the CO, those miraculous salt pills - - an omni-utilitant restorative, and finally, those nightly floor shows - - we scrubbed them 'till they gleamed for some brass that never appeared.

But there were movies (when there was no night problem) and the PX (Post Exchange), and you could write a letter or listen to the radio. And Van Dorn had the most beautiful sunsets you ever saw, and you had Sunday off (often Saturday afternoon if they didn't nab you for the kitchen or some other detail). True, there were no passes then, but most of the fellas' wanted furloughs, not passes - - rookies are like that. And then there was quite a fuss over the new Pfc's - - cocks of the walk then. They earned it, though. They went to NCO (Non-commissioned Officer) school every night and listened to a lot of drivel.

The 28th of August arrived. All units had passed their training exams with flying colors and now basic was officially over. Would they get that long awaited, oft promised furlough? Heck no! They left for a bivouac at their old training grounds, Dixie Springs. After a few days, upon return to Camp Van Dorn, the entire Battalion moved to the Louisiana Maneuver Area, about 250 miles distant.

There followed the two most difficult months that the men of Company A had ever endured to that date. Maneuvers were tough. Guard was rugged - - 2 hours on and 2 hours off, existed 24 hours a day. And in those days you stood on post with all equipment on your person. For the first two weeks Company A maintained the roads in the vicinity of Florien, Louisiana. Those roads weren't macadam as they generally were in Europe, later on - - but plain old, dusty when dry and muddy when wet - - dirt. "Able" worked them in the rain, in the sun and in the dust. Life was a nightmare of movements at night, fatigue, labor, and darn little to eat. At times there were only two scanty meals a day. The brass called it "conditioning" but the men called it "murder". On the 24th of September, Company A moved out and built a 25-ton heavy pontoon bridge across the Sabine River. The men of "Able" will always remember that night - - for carrying pontoon and trestle both down a 70-degree 150-foot slope is no fun. Neither is one company building a pontoon bridge, especially if you have to get up the next morning and take it down. Again the road maintenance continued and always "Able" was on the move.

On the 24th of October a cadre left Company A to form the nucleus of the 260th Engineer Combat Battalion. S/Sgt. James N. McLennan replaced 1st Sgt. Lasky as 1st Sergeant.

On the 17th of November "Able" returned to Van Dorn. It was then deep fall and bitterly cold. There wasn't a man who was not thankful in his heart to see the smokestacks and water towers of Camp Van Dorn once again. Outside of the Camp a squad of the 2nd Platoon narrowly missed death when their truck was hit by a fast passenger train - - they had jumped in time and no one was seriously injured.

The 21st of November found "Able" entrained for Sharonville Engineer Depot, Sharonville, Ohio. And it was here that the men of Company A rested from the rigors of maneuvers. Never was a situation (at least in the army) better suited for such. There, passes every evening after work. And Sharonville boasted "beaucoup" females. If you didn't like the small towns you could catch a bus and be in Cincinnati in 20 minutes.

Thanksgiving, with all the trimmings was spent here. Women (if you had a steady gal) were invited. It was the nearest thing to a home-cooked dinner for this occasion that they had while in the service. Many of the men had rented houses and had their wives visiting them - - this was the army they'd heard about. Yeah man!

They'd been called to the Depot to test the interchangeability of parts for a new prefabricated steel pier. It was snap work, 'specially after maneuvers. But this tea party was quickly broken up after two weeks, and December 7th found "Able" en route to Camp Van Dorn for "Preparation for Overseas Movement" (POM) training. Still no mention of furloughs. At the end of basic the first order received 7-day furloughs, but the rest of the Company were still waiting. December 31st saw the departure of 1st Lieutenant Cadwalader for overseas service.

Then came the multitude of qualifying tests needed for POM training. Mls, carbines, infiltration courses through the ever-present mud, bivouacs in air-ground training in the bitter cold, classes in military censorship and the like. Machine gun tests in which no one qualified for a week or so. There were always week-end passes to Baton Rouge, though, and that town still remembers the 163rd, I'll bet. Then the furloughs began - - in order of qualification with training. Many a guy couldn't go home 'till his teeth were fixed or he had made the 25-mile march (which killed everyone). After this hike, the Company area looked like an invalid home - - few indeed could walk without limping. Then too, an assault on the simulated "Westwall" on the outskirts of the Camp was essential before a fella' could go home, with the net result that many only got five- or six-day furloughs.

February 20th - - "Able", fully girded and equipped, entrained for Camp Shanks, NY - - the POE (Port of Embarkation). After a week of cold, inspections and waiting for a pass to New York City - - which many had never seen, we left Shanks and boarded ship - - the luxury liner, "S.S. Christobal". That was February 25th, 1944. There were no bands playing, but the sea was smooth as the ship passed the "Lady in Green" and out into the Atlantic. Only the Lord knew the men of Company A would see that lovely sight again - - but others were doing it every day, so they could too!

Life aboard ship wasn't bad - - except that guard was 4 hours on and 8 hours off, and they routed you out of bed for boat drills, etc. - - besides that, the boat made peculiar rolling movements that caused some of the less salty ones to spend a good portion of their time at the rail. If you were very patient or owned an "MP" badge it might be possible to buy something at the PX. The meals were excellent - - for those who could retain them in their intended place.

After passing Northern Ireland (Eire), Scotland, and the English coast via the Irish Sea, the Christobal docked at Swansea, South Wales, March 9th, 1944. They'd arrived at last. The following day the Company entrained for Fargo Tent Camp, a reception camp (on the Salisbury Plain).

After six days of orientation, inspection and close order drill, ball games, etc. - - "Able" moved by motor convoy to Over Norton Camp, situated near the town of Chipping Norton, England, and near the towns of Banbury, famous in a nursery rhyme, Stratford-upon-Avon - - birthplace of Shakespeare and still famous for its Shakespearean dramatics at Memorial Theater there, and Oxford, city of many universities and colleges.

Here, training was established. Polishing of the rough edges in readying the men for combat that would come with the invasion. There were frequent bivouacs for the purpose of building bridges with speed and precision. Old bridges were practiced upon and new bridges learned. Then too, there was a good deal of road work. Many a road was built for "Farmer Brown." Both he and A

company benefited by this experience. Frequent work with mine-fields also was required in training.

But all was not labor - - for each night passes were granted (if you weren't restricted) to the nearby towns. Many an Engineer has a girl in England with fond memories of the spring of '44. The "fish and chips" at the local inn, the beer that tasted like dishwater, the "jelly sandwiches" and tarts at the canteens, the beautiful English countryside in spring, the goose that cost some fellas in the 2nd platoon 50 shillings, Banbury and Oxford parks, the awful movies that they showed at the theaters, the presentation at the Memorial Theater in Stratford-upon-Avon, the London Philharmonic, those long battalion mess lines, the cold showers every other day, the fence that everyone went over, the guard house (it was always full), powdered eggs - - invariable - - these were all a part of the life at Over Norton.

On June 6th the invasion was launched. Being Army troops (1st Army) the 163rd weren't present nor required for a while after the initial assault. But on the 21st of June, the main body of "Able" arrived at the marshaling area on the southeastern coast of England. It was at this time that the severe storm struck the English Channel, carrying away the prefabricated docks on the American beaches. The more sheltered British docks were saved.

This same storm whipped the normally rough waters of the Channel to such a degree that they were temporarily nonnavigable. For five days the men did nothing but play ball, sleep and eat. Life was very easy - - then. They had been briefed and knew their mission and objective. Thus, on the 25th of June, well rested, the storm having spent itself, Company A boarded an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) at Weymouth, for France. "Able" landed on Utah Beach at 2100 hours, Sunday, June 26th, 1944 - - 20 days after the initial assault. There was little evidence of the fierce struggle, of the blood and flesh that had been here sacrificed. There was an occasional mine being detonated, which scared the daylights out of everyone, but the few bodies floating, bloated, with the tide, seemed to impress upon everyone the seriousness of the future period - - this was really war. Dozers had cleared the beach of debris, and for miles all that could be seen were LST's and their mates pouring forth men and supplies from their maws.

As the beach was left behind, the evidences of conflict became more apparent - - rutted roads and fields - - pock-marked by mine and shell, fire blackened pill boxes, disintegrated houses. The first night in France was spent a short way from the de-waterproofing area. And on June 27th the unit arrived and dug in in an area midway between Bricquebec and St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte. It was here that the first work was undertaken. Normandy, as a whole, is financially inept, so its main roads were ill-equipped to bear the rigors of modern war. Thus from dawn to dusk the men patched, tarred, and tamped the ravaged road. It had a double significance now, for Lieutenant General George S. Patton's crack armored divisions were moving over it, and tracked vehicles play havoc with a road of any sort. During this period the front lines were at times only 6 or 7 miles away. No rear echelon existed. On 17 July the Company moved to an area outside of St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte, scene of a vicious engagement when units of an airborne division took the town. Now it was a mass of rubble.

Here the same work continued - - road maintenance. The work halted for several days while what is believed to be among the first PW (Prisoner of War) stockades was erected. August 2nd found "Able" moving to an area outside of Carentan, another historic battlefield. All these moves were long after the

fighting had passed. As Army Engineers they saw no action, only the havoc and results of battle as they followed the advance forces. Then it was that the first night convoy took place - - a long night move to Ernée. It was at this time that the 3rd Army was making its spectacular blitz, or at least the beginning of it. The breakthrough had come at St. Lo and now the Third, Fourth, and Sixth Armored Divisions were exploiting the break. The spearhead to the south passed through Ernée, Laval, Rennes, Le Mans (it was here that "Able" was transferred from 1st Army to the 3rd and made Corps Engineers, XV Corps), Montfort le Rotnou, and Alençon. Patton's dash had been so rapid that Engineers were called upon to protect flanks and consolidate ground. Thus it was that prisoners were taken from time to time.

On the 13th of August A Company ran into her first contact with enemy fire! While bivouacked at Bonnétable the Company was strafed while deployed in the woods. The aircraft were driven off by P-51's which were chasing them at the time. Many a latrine became a fox-hole expedient, and gladly so. On the morning of the 15th (August) "Able" was again strafed - - this time by a single aircraft. No casualties! Five prisoners had been taken the previous evening, the first of many. Practically the only work being done was occasional sweeping of roads for mines - - none were ever found - - Jerry had been in a hurry. All the while extensive moves were being made to keep pace with the divisions she was supporting - - 5th Armored and 79th Infantry Divisions.

On the 16th of August "Able" was forced to retire to an area farther back when an encounter with enemy units was imminent. Continual air activity and strafing for the next few days had the whole Company "sweating it out." The Company, deployed in an island of scrub trees approximately 150 yards by 50 yards, was an easy target. However, the .50 cal. MG's (machine guns) on the trucks made a formidable AA (anti-aircraft) battery, that few planes enjoyed. During the movements at night fighting could be easily seen on both flanks.

Finally, seven days to the day of first enemy activity and acceptance as Corps Engineers "Able", together with B Company, built the first bridge across the Seine River, a 635-foot Treadway bridge! No enemy activity encountered. Aircraft patrolled the bridge during construction. In the following weeks over a hundred enemy planes were lost to our AA and fighters in attempting to knock the bridge out. These attempts could be seen from the bivouac area several miles from the bridge. About this time repeated strafing of trucks while on road patrol made that an undesirable occupation. The 79th Division, having crossed the river, joined in the closing of the famous Falaise pocket. "Able" Company, acting as infantry, dug in near Tilly-sur-Seine to prevent isolated German forces from cutting through to escape toward Germany. No action was encountered.

On 31 August A Company arrived at the Jouy-le-Châtel area for a rest. It was while here, in the throes of close order drill, inspections and all the requisites of a rest, that 47 prisoners were taken by the 1st Platoon of A Company under 1st Lieutenant John DeLorenzo. Several of the enemy were killed and several wounded in the process.

There followed more days of moving. The enemy was routed, temporarily. Long moves of 80 and 90 miles followed - - through Brienne, Fuligny, La Chaise, vicinity of Briele, Neufchâteau, and Frenelle-le-Grande. It was here that "Able" was first shelled - - a few scattered rounds landed close by the area - - no casualties. Lost two men of the 2nd Platoon while investigating a booby-trapped automobile. Continued road patrols and mine sweeping daily.

September 28th "Able" Company built a treadway bridge across the Meurthe River outside the city of Lunéville. There followed a prolonged period during which two fixed bridges were erected to supplant the treadway. The 79th Infantry Division, fighting the most vicious battle of its career in the Parroy Forest several miles from Lunéville, was making slow progress. "Able's" activities were restricted to mine sweeping on road shoulders, road maintenance, and building, with other companies of the battalion, of a large steel stringered, fixed bridge. Also a continual road patrol existed. With the advent of fall and rain "Able" moved into a factory in the city proper.

At last on the 21st of November, after a two-month halt in this city, the unit moved on to Igney, and it was in this small, shell-battered town that "Able" spent its first Thanksgiving overseas. Yes, turkey and all - - in the pouring rain and three inches of mud! Continually patrolling the road and filling road craters, "Able" Company, on the day after Thanksgiving, moved into the buildings that had once constituted a German officers' school in the city of Sarrebourg. With the CP (command post) remaining at this spot, the three line platoons went out to build and man road blocks in conjunction with the other companies of the Battalion. It was later learned that engineers were all that protected the city proper on an exposed flank. It was here that the Company ran into its first severe artillery pounding. A 3-gun harassing battery laid shells in on no. 2 road block (3rd Platoon, Co. A) at 15-second intervals for two nights. On the third night our artillery ended the nightmare with counter-battery fire - - net result: 4 civilians killed. "Able" suffered no casualties, being dug in as they were and having the added safety factor of being surrounded by water. A large stream had submerged the surrounding fields to a surprising depth. The day following the finish of the shelling, a P-47, through some inadvertency, released a 500-lb. bomb that narrowly missed no. 2 road block. The water absorbed the fragments and concussion - - no casualties. It was the second night on these road blocks that men first saw the German "Jet Jobs."

After being relieved of the road blocks, the work again returned to road patrols, mine sweeping, and road maintenance. The weather now was turning cold, for it was the 7th of December. A Company left Sarrebourg and moved to Hirschland, doing the routine work that is always to be done. Hirschland will always be remembered by the men of "Able" - - for its "still" that produced "beaucoup" cognac! Steps were taken to prevent the flow of the potent liquid. Jerry had started his Ardennes push, and to meet that threat, certain divisions were pulled from the 7th Army front to stem the Luxembourg offensive. The lines were consequently withdrawn from their salients and shortened to cover the removal of those troops. Therefore, upon launching an offensive, it was little wonder that the Germans were regaining the unimportant town of Wingen-sur-Moder, which might have made the situation appear "serious." This small town was located on the main supply route between Hagenau and Saareguemines.

The Germans had the elite 15th S.S. Mountain Division driving through the mountains in an all-out attempt to cut the road and disrupt supply and communication. Opposing the offensive was the 179th Infantry Regiment, 45th Division, and they were supplemented by what was then designated as a task force, but is now known as the 70th Division, to the extent of one battalion. "Able's" assignment was to erect and maintain an extensive array of road blocks, which someone labeled "poison."

On the 9th of December the outfit moved a little farther up the line to Rexingen. "Able" had left the 79th at Lunéville, she was then in support of the 44th Infantry Division. But at Rexingen it again changed, this time to support

the Century (100th) Division. The work while at Rexingen was comprised of erecting several Bailey bridges, and road maintenance for the new armored divisions moving up - - the 11th and 12th. Road patrol continued also.

December 25th, the first Christmas overseas for men of "A", was spent very favorably - - sans tree, but with a church in Rexingen. Winter had made its advent, and there were occasional snow flurries, however the men were billeted in homes by that time.

A good Christmas under their belts, the men of "Able" moved out of Rexingen on the 29th of December and moved into Wingen. The situation on the 7th Army front during this period might be deemed "serious."

Working 24 hours a day on road blocks, crater charges, and preparing bridges for demolition in the vicinity of Wingen in the bitter cold, these obstacles were nearing completion when the Germans broke through on the 4th of January. All three line platoons were distributed widely among their allotted obstacles, along with two platoons of Co. C, 1271st Engineers attached to "Able" for the emergency. A constant patrol was out to give first possible alarm of a breakthrough. In Wingen proper the 3rd Platoon of "Able" had three obstacles: a road block and 2 crater charges. These men were all trapped by the ensuing enemy attack. Meanwhile, Company Hq had moved several miles to a safer area at Puberg and set up operations. The 2nd Platoon of "Able" under 1st Lt. James C. Sides had a squad trapped on a block to the flank of the oncoming Germans. Third Platoon, Lt. Bruce H. Suter commanding, was situated in adjacent Wimmenau, approximately 2 miles from Wingen on the same supply route. The offensive that captured Wingen on the 4th of January severed contact with his men on the posts in Wingen, thus they were trapped. Of the men on the first road block - - Pvt Eldridge Richardson, Pfc George E. Wojhehoski, and Cpl Hester(?) fought their way to safety. Pvt Joseph F. Sparrow and Pvt Patrick J. Sullivan, who was seriously wounded, were taken prisoner after 24 hours in the cellar of a house. They were released upon recapture of the town. On the other two road blocks, both parties were trapped in houses. T/5 Charles Martin, Pvt William D. Moyer, and Sgt Rado F. Wade fought their way from a blazing house in which they were trapped with men of the 70th Division, with the aid of a Sherman tank which covered their flight. Pvts John J. Donnelly, William P. Keen, and Charles C. Perrone were trapped in a cellar for several days. They were released by the infantrymen who retook the town, but not before they were taken for krauts and nearly shot on the spot.

Elements of the 180th Regt, 45th Inf Div cut off the Germans occupying the town, thus preventing the removal of prisoners or the flow of supplies. After a four day battle, the town was retaken and a counter-offensive halted. The town of Wimmenau resisted all attempts by the Germans to capture it, and thus the supply route was kept intact. The trapped squad of the 2nd Platoon made their way to our lines via an escape route.

Units of the 1271st suffered several severe casualties when a German-manned American tank took the personnel of one of the forward blocks by surprise. Lt. Suter was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service during this operation. Pvt Moyer and T/5 Martin received citations for duty in the face of enemy activity.

Jan 5th, this organization moved to an area at Durstel and were billeted there. The line units, after being relieved from duty at Wingen, joined the Co Hq at this area. The released prisoners and those who fled to safety joined their respective platoons there.

After a short rest the regular work was resumed. A week or so was spent in digging secondary defensive positions for the 398th Regt, 100th Div. This work completed, it was necessary to reconstruct and repair a road which had served as an MSR (main supply route) for the 100th Div, but due to the extensive snows and alternate thaws and the military traffic, it was practically a quagmire. A good deal of time and effort were spent before the project took shape. Over one and a half months were spent on the construction and maintenance of this road. It would be well to note that during this two and a half months stay at this area, the front lines were static. The 7th Army in this sector employed defensive type warfare. Heavy snow, extremely difficult terrain and lack of offensive strength made this necessary. There was a regular (or so it appeared to the men) parachute drill every Tuesday night, consequently the guard was doubled, much to everyone's disgust. An ounce of prevention - - good advice in war.

On the 17th of March after a two and a half months stop, "Able" moved to Rimling. It had been a bitter winter, and many a man had frost-bitten feet, but now it was breaking, and the weather was improving. The main occupation at this particular moment was the sweeping of road shoulders for mines. On the 18th Co A moved to Ormersviller, a small town just over the line from Germany, yet still in Alsace.

It was while removing a mine field of German plastic mines by hand that Sgt Calvin F. Duncan and Pvt Hugh J. Schneider were seriously wounded when a trip wire detonated the mine. Sgt Duncan was carrying it against his midriff when the explosion occurred. Pvt Schneider later returned to the organization. Both received Purple Heart awards.

The enemy had been shelling all salient crossroads with zeroed guns in this section. Battalion Headquarters had been continuously shelled in the town of Volmunster. On the 18th the 3rd Platoon of Company A was shelled for 3 hours while attempting to repair a bridge in the area. The enemy was determined to halt progress to the Rhineland. Fischbach was the next area as A Company moved into Germany on the 23rd of March, passing through the devastated cities of Zweibrücken, Homburg and Kaiserslautern along the main supply route to the Armies advancing on the Rhine. The Battalion was at this time in support of the 3rd Infantry Division.

The 24th of March found 1st Lieutenant Garland T. Byrd replacing 1st Lt. Suter, who had succeeded Captain Garrity as CO of "Able" on the 22nd of March.

After moving to the Beindersheim area on the 25th of March "Able" was briefed on their coming mission, building of a treadway bridge across the Rhine River in support of the 3rd Division. After a terrific artillery barrage that started at 0200 hours on the 26th of March, "Able", with the other companies of the Battalion, commenced erecting the required 978-foot span at about 0700 hours on the same day, after a trip from the Beindersheim area to the bridge site several miles south of Worms. At approximately 0900 hours the first shells started falling. Firing observed fire that was uncannily accurate, the enemy again and again put in air bursts directly over the bridge being assembled. Working in a virtual sea of shrapnel, the men continued work regardless of the mounting casualties. Several times the fire became so intense that labor was ceased and the men called in, not that anyone needed to be persuaded. Sgt Johnny L. Austin of the 1st Platoon and his squad deserve a great deal of credit for continuing work during air bursts.

Credit should be given to all present. The artillery observer who was directing fire was silenced by a .50 cal. machine gun when he was detected on a small island on the upstream side of the bridge. This elimination of the observer, coupled with the cooperation of a flight of P-47's tended to induce the Kraut battery toward silence, thus upon completion of the bridge at approximately 1600 hours, no enemy shelling existed. The next problem was to build a suitable road for the bridge approach. This required time and maintenance.

After completing the bridge across the Rhine, "Able" moved to an area at Bürstadt where mine sweeping and maintenance of the bridge approach roads was undertaken. On the 31st of March the unit moved to Wörth, 50 miles distant. "Able" was still in support of the 3rd Division, which was mopping up for the 12th and later the 14th Armored Divisions. The lines were moving rapidly in the face of crumbling German resistance. This made it necessary to move frequently. Road craters were the biggest problem at this time. Long moves of 40 to 50 miles per move were made. Now another specialty came into effect; the need for bridges. As a last resort in trying to stem the fast-moving offensive, the Germans were blowing everything that would create an obstacle for the advancing armies. Not a bridge was left standing. The men of "Able" often worked 24 hours a day at bridges on the MSRs. Bailey bridges and fixed bridges both were built in a grueling effort to keep the armies rolling.

April 7th found Captain Garrity replacing 1st Lt Byrd as CO of this company, while bivouacked near Wiesthal, Germany. Road patrol was again continued. A pile-driven fixed bridge was built across the Saale River at Bad Kissingen. This is noteworthy in that it was the initial effort in pile-driven bents. Result was favorable. The sweeping of road shoulders for mines was resumed when no specific task was imminent. The night of April 18th sentries shot and seriously wounded a German who was taken prisoner, and later in the evening another was captured. The next day a single prisoner was taken. April 23rd Lt Robert A. Scalfi, Jr. was promoted to 1st Lt. It was while at Effeltrich that the 1st Platoon of A Co under Lt. Bernard S. Holzman performed the difficult feat of building a fixed (wooden) bridge beneath a Bailey bridge (that was still in use). This was accomplished by working night and day to facilitate the push on Nürnberg. Upon completion of the bridge, the entire Company disassembled the 90-foot (Bailey bridge) span without holding traffic up to any degree, this being a considerable feat on a dual Corps (XV) and (XXI) MSR. Considerable enemy air activity at night was encountered at this time. Bombing of a Bailey Bridge, which was later disassembled, and strafing of nearby towns testified to the last flights of the vaunted Luftwaffe. At Buchdorf another prisoner was taken. The German Army had disintegrated in some places, leaving the countryside teeming with roving Jerries, thus the number of prisoners taken is easily understood.

After the capture of Nürnberg by the 3rd, 45th and 42nd Divisions, selected members of "Able" marched in a victory parade in that city. It was staged as an example to the German people who still believed in fascism. The city itself was completely leveled, being a prime target of our bombers.

On the 26th of April, A Co encountered heavy shell fire while building the rafts and ferrying materiel over the Danube River in support of the 42nd Div. Upon completion of this mission, the unit withdrew to a nearby area, being in constant line of counter-battery fire from both sides. One casualty resulted. A crane operator was injured by shrapnel. He'd been attached to this unit for the mission. The following day "Able" with Co B of the Battalion built a 276-ft. treadway bridge across the Lech Canal in support of the 42nd Div. Moving on

to the town of Rain, after building and maintaining road approaches to the bridge, "Able" captured four prisoners on the 29th of April.

April 30th, acting as a unit attached to the 179th Regt, 3rd Bn, 45th Div in conjunction with a task force that was assigned the guarding of certain buildings in the city of Munich (München) Germany, A Co moved 84 miles to this city. The line Platoons followed the Inf into the city the night of its capture and occupied the buildings to which they were assigned, Co Hq remaining in the field, bivouacked in a park in the city proper. A memorable time was had by all, and for 4 days the men of this Company rested, wined, and dined at complete leisure, living in beautiful apartment houses and drinking champagne - - who could ever forget Munich? But all good things must come to an end as do all evil things, for the war was rapidly ending with the mass surrender and military routs that had been achieved. So on the morning of May 4th "Able" moved out of Munich to an area near Offling, in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. Capt Leland H. Bishop replaced Capt Garrity as CO of "Able." After ten months combat service Co A was destined for a break. Accordingly, on the 7th of May (the day which marked the capitulation of Field Marshall Kesselring's forces to the 6th Army Group) A Co moved to Gaden for a 15-day rest period. After 4 days the rest was terminated and the unit moved to Teisdorf where work started on a nearly completed bypass that led as a MSR to and from Munich and Salzburg. After a 24-hour-a-day schedule and completion of the project, A Co moved to a small resort on a lake in the foothills of the Salzburger Alps. After a stay of several days Company A, with the Battalion, moved to Hüttau in the heart of the High Tauern Alps. The mission was to prepare bridges for the passage of combat team "B" of the 20th Armored Div, which was moving south supposedly to Trieste, in view of that dispute. "Able's" mission consisted of putting tread on the last bridges and then guarding the bridges. Mission completed, A Co returned to Salzburg, Austria, where she is billeted at the present time.

Whether Co A will ever again see action as a unit is a question that few can answer. But if she again goes into combat, you can bet your Engr. Castle that she'll live up to, and perhaps surpass, the reputation that the men of her ranks have gained for her in the European war. Good Luck, Able - - you're a lady with a past of which you can be justly proud.

Transcriber's note: These pages were taken directly from partially typewritten and partially small engineer's manuscript done in pencil on quite yellowed paper. No corrections were made to the original writing except where obvious misspellings were noted. All names and places were transcribed as accurately as possible.

John Brasaemle, July 1997.

Editor's note: First names of individuals, where known, have been added the first time they are mentioned, some spelling of place names has been corrected to the extent that they could be identified on maps, and some military abbreviations have been explained in parentheses for the benefit of our Grandchildren.

Mark Gardner, January 1998.