

Tales from the Past

[Bill Wolf wrote the following in the form of emails to friends about his experience in the 1115th Engineer Combat Group assigned to the 19th Corps of Engineers. He recounts some of his experiences in England and Normandy.]

Last Months in the U.S. – Sent Sunday, July 24, 2005 2:01 PM

The job of whipping a new unit into shape, especially when the unit consisted of a new concept of operation, was an experience that I would not like to go through again. We had nothing to base our performance on except to try to put ourselves in the place of the Corps Engineer and play it by the seat of our pants.

We, the 1115th Engineer Combat Group, had been assigned to 19th Corps whose patch was a Silver Tomahawk on a field of blue. As I remember it, we were assigned two Engineer [C] Battalions, two Bridge units [one was a Heavy Pontoon Battalion, the other a Bailey Bridge Company] and a Maintenance Platoon.

I was assigned to the Headquarters Company of Group which supplied the enlisted personnel for the operations of the staff, also vehicles and their maintenance. Among my other duties, I was the Motor officer with a maintenance staff of two men. The staff was on the road most of the time, traveling between the various units. Colonel Underwood was constantly going somewhere in his Command Car. Trying to get the vehicles “dead lined” [out of service for maintenance] was like pulling teeth.

I was due to go on leave in June. Three weeks before I was to leave, Corps sprang a surprise inspection of our entire group. When the results came back a week later, the Colonel called me into his office. We had placed second behind one of the battalions and he didn't like being second best. He Said, “Wolf, we are the Headquarters' Company of this Group and as such I expect that we should set an example for the rest. Until you can assure me that we can withstand any inspection that Corps throws at us, your leave is cancelled. Now what will you have to do in order to give me that assurance?”

I thought for a moment and told him that I would have to have permission to dead line all vehicles in turn, including his Command car, for sufficient time to perform the recommended 10,000 mile maintenance. Also, in order to do this with the least amount of disruption of service and to speed up the process, it would help if I could get some additional help in the Motor Pool. To make a long story short, I got four more men and we got the job done and I got to go on leave as scheduled. Went home and spent time with my parents and friends Got all the way through the list of things I wanted to do except ask the girl to marry me.

Got back to Camp Swift, realized what had happened, sent a wire and said, “Come on Down”. The answer was yes, so the wheels started to turn. I went to the Catholic Chaplain to get a dispensation as Anita was Catholic while I was Protestant. That was no problem. Everyone was so helpful, the other officer's wives took over the job of finding us a house, arranging the wedding and a small reception in the Officers Club and all the 101 details that go with arranging an affair like this...

Anita arrived and after the initial greeting was over, broke down in tears. It turned out that she had tried to get a dispensation at her local parish and was turned down. She went over the head of the local priest and went to the Diocese where the answer was the same. She told them that whether she had it or not, she was going to Texas to get married. When I showed her that piece of paper the tears started again because it meant that she could still follow her faith.

I had asked the Colonel if he would do the honors of giving away the bride and he accepted. The day of the wedding arrived and everyone was at the site except the Colonel. He had the job of supervising a demolition problem that morning and things didn't go according to schedule. It seems that while I was on leave, another unit had an accident during a similar problem and lost a platoon that had returned to the site to critique the exercise. Three charges had been set but only two had gone off. The secondary fuse for the third charge burned slower than anticipated and went off when the men were standing over the charge.

After that, instructions were set up that if there was the least doubt; the site was to be excavated to account for all explosives. This happened the morning of the wedding and the Colonel was an hour late.

The wedding was on Wednesday and we got all of two days for a honeymoon as the unit was scheduled to leave for maneuvers in Louisiana on Saturday. There were only a few things memorable about maneuvers in Louisiana. During our stay, I had been reassigned from HQ's Co to Assistant S-4 which is the section responsible for supply. The boss of this section was a Major Evans, a tall, laid back character from Minnesota. He and I struck it off immediately. The relationship lasted for many years after the war, but more about this as it occurs.

About a month after into maneuvers, the unit received a change in TO&E [Table of Organization & Equipment] This included adding a Communication Section [Officer and two enlisted men] plus a ¾ ton truck and all the equipment, Radio, Switchboard, wire and Lord knows what else. The truck was located at Camp Chafee, Oklahoma and all the Signal Corp equipment was at our home base, Camp Swift, Texas. Guess who was designated to go pick it up?

The Motor Sergeant and I were assigned a Jeep for the trip. You never saw anyone get packed and ready to leave as fast as the two of us. We headed for Camp Chafee first so that we would have the truck to carry all the equipment. When we arrived at Chafee, the Sergeant went over that truck with a fine tooth comb. Found several things wrong with it that had to be fixed to his satisfaction before I would accept the truck. This delay caused us to arrive at the Signal Corp warehouse at Camp Swift on Saturday about 1100 hours.

The Sergeant in charge took one look at the requisition and told us he couldn't possibly fill it before 1200 hours when they closed for the weekend, I told him that my orders were to pick up the equipment and return to Louisiana ASAP. No luck. We were stuck at Camp Swift until Monday. This was a classic case of "PYA". I went to Signal Headquarters and sent the Colonel a wire advising him what happened and requested instructions. Then I gave the Sergeant a 48 hour pass and the jeep, called Anita and had her drive to the post and pick me up. Nothing else I could do until either I heard from the Colonel or I picked up the stuff on Monday.

We, Anita and I, went to our home in Austin, contacted Captain Linden and his wife for a party that evening. We had a ball. Called all the wives of the officers to bring them up to date on what was going on and to take any news back to their husbands. We had a most delightful weekend in Austin. I arrived back at Swift at 0800 hours. Monday morning just in time to get a telegram that had just come in from the Colonel. It read, "Pick up all equipment at Swift and return ASAP."

Finally got to the unit in the maneuver area sometime Wednesday and found a message from the Colonel to report to him ASAP. This I did without delay.

He took one look at me, frowned and said, "I don't know how you did it but it's done. How is Versa? [His wife] I told him the whole story and all was well.

A short time later we were alerted that we were scheduled for shipment overseas. Our stay in Louisiana was cut short which didn't make anyone unhappy. The unit returned to Camp Swift to prepare to ship out. Major Evans, the S-4 Sergeant, a Corporal from S-1 [Personnel] and I were designated as he advance party for the unit. We would go to England and prepared the space assigned to our unit for the arrival of the balance of the unit. We packed our stuff and shipped out in early November for Fort Jay which is located in Brooklyn in the shadow of the Verrazano Bridge.

Anita was working at the time but had hopes of getting home before I shipped out. As it turned out, this was not to be but it was something for her to look forward to.

This is as good a place to call it quits as any. I promise that the next installment will be along shortly.

Sent: War Years 1942-45 – Thursday, April 14, 2005 11:49 AM

Dear Adrian,

Will pick up where I left off in my saga of military life. No doubt the early stages will be a bit on the boring side but I promise that once we get clear of basic training, it will get better.

The night before I was to report to the induction center my friends gave me a going away party. The next day I reported for induction and was in no shape for anything. The first thing the army threw at us was a test, results of which was supposed to indicate our basic intelligence and from that, our ability to survive in the military. Truthfully, I was so hung over I didn't even remember taking the test. Then we were interviewed to find out where we would best fit in the Army. Due to the fact I had enlisted, I was told I would have my choice of several areas of service. When they heard that I had been a sheet metal worker and had graduated from an aircraft maintenance school, the interviewer recommended that I be assigned to either Air Force or Light Tank Maintenance. Either one of these areas were fine with me.

We were shipped from there to Fort Dix, NJ for issuance of uniforms and equipment. After about a week we were put on a train and three days later arrived at Camp Shelby, Mississippi to be assigned to our unit for basic training. On the way into camp I failed to see any aircraft or tanks, which caused me to wonder if someone had made a mistake. We were put on a bus and taken to one of the base theater buildings where they assigned us to the unit w would train with. Surprise! Surprise!! When my name was called, I found out that I had been

assigned to the 310th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 85th Infantry division. So much for getting my choice of where I would serve.

After about a week of basic [familiarization with a rifle, marching etc.] our company was assigned the job of building the division obstacle course. My platoon had the job of cutting down trees, trimming them, cutting them to length and loading them in trucks for transportation to the site. The first day we were loaded into trucks and taken out to the forest about 8 miles from camp. Our platoon leader, Lt. Linden, [more about him later] told us we had a quota of logs and that if we didn't meet it, we would have to march back to camp. That first day we failed to make quota. After a full day in the woods, working our tails off, it was no fun hiking 8 miles back to camp to a cold supper. That never happened again.

Lt. Linden was the platoon second platoon leader. The first one looked the part, tailored uniforms and all that stuff, but wasn't a leader. He was too soft and gentle to whip a bunch of greenhorns into fighting men. One weekend he went down to the Gulf of Mexico for a bit of R&R, went to the beach and fell asleep. The sun burnt him to a crisp. When he showed up for reveille Monday morning, his uniform was plastered to his skin from all the sun burn ointment. Getting burnt like that was a "NO, NO" as it affected one's performance. The Company Commander took one look at him and shipped him out. The next morning this small, [5'4"] red headed 2nd Lt. took over the platoon. He had been a regular army first sergeant with the 2nd Bn, Corps of engineers @ Fort Sam Houston, Texas. This was one of the best and toughest engineer battalions in the army. He took over our platoon, worked our tails off and after the first week of this, if we had met him in a dark alley, I think we would have killed him.

Our education progressed, learning road building, camouflage, erection of various type bridges, demolition, etc, all the things an army engineer has to know. By this time I had progressed through the ranks to Platoon Sgt. One day we were out building a corduroy road under Linden's supervision, when he left for some reason. While he was gone the Company Commander showed up, took one look at the way we were building the road, called me over and proceeded to give me hell. Just then Linden showed up, pushed me out of the way, looked the captain in the eye and said, "Captain, this is my platoon and what they are doing is in accordance with my instructions. If you don't like it, talk to me about it, not them." The Captain backed off and from that moment on Lt. Linden could do no wrong in our book.

From time to time, either the Company Commander or Lt. Linden would speak to me about going to OCS [Officer Candidate School] and I would always refuse saying, "I didn't want to be a commissioned officer. One day the Company Commander called me into his office and said, "Wolf, in front of you is an application for OCS that I want you to sign. If you don't sign it, tomorrow you will be a PFC." Needless to say I signed it. I didn't want to lose my stripes.

One day about a month later, the company was in the field doing an infiltration exercise. Two platoons were in position on top of a hill and our platoon was trying to take the position. Linden told us that the defenders would try to make us reveal our position by calling out for us to stand up. He said unless I tell you to stand up you don't move.

We were making good progress up the hill; several of the men had been detected and were out of the exercise. I had gotten to within about 15' of the first position when I heard a jeep pull in on top of the hill. It was the Company Commander. He came to the edge of the slope and called out for me to stand up. No one moved. We took our orders from Linden. I heard Linden, who was on top of the hill, speak to the CO after which he took a whistle, blew it and said "Exercise is over. Wolf, stand up." To make a long story short, OCS had speeded up the program, called for more students and I had to leave for Fort Belvoir, Va. that night in charge of 8 men. Somehow or other I got them all together and on the train. One of them went AWOL on the way to OCS.

The next three months are a period in my life I would not rather think about. That period is a blur and I'd rather leave it like that. I graduated on January 6, 1943 a brand new "90 Day Wonder" as we were called, eager for my first assignment. I had been given a 10 day delay in route and permission to use my car as transportation to my new post so I went home to get ready for the trip to Camp Claiborne, La.

VWVII Stories – Tuesday, April 19, 2005 10:42 AM

Adrian,

Haven't heard from you since I started writing these stories. Wonder if you want me to continue in the format I'm using or would you rather I relate just the isolated incidents as chapters. Don't make any difference to me. Let me know. That being said, I will continue the saga of the Wolf experiences in the military.

On January 6, 1943, I became what was called "A 90 day wonder;" a brand new 2nd Lt. in the Army Corps of Engineers that had graduated from OCS. In 90 days the Army had transformed me from an enlisted man with only 8 months experience into a commissioned officer ready to teach new recruits how to become a fighting machine.

I had been given 10 days delay in reporting to my first assignment which was to the Camp Claiborne,

La. Motor Pool. I had been authorized to use my own vehicle for transportation so I went home to bid farewell to my family and friends and also to prepare my car for the trip. Gas rationing was in effect so I had to get coupons in order to purchase gas. I went to Ft. Jay, NY, showed them my orders and was issued blank coupons that would be filled out for each purchase. This gave me an idea.

I went to an automobile junk yard and purchased a gas tank that would hold about 20 gallons, installed it in the car's trunk and cross connected it to the main gas supply line leading to the engine. A petcock isolated the two tanks. Now I had a gas capacity of about 38 gallons, which in a 1940 Pontiac 6 cylinder was good for about 550 miles if one filled up when the total tank capacity dropped to ¼ full. I often wondered if anyone checked those coupons and raised a question as to how you could put 29 gallons of gas in a car that only had an 18 gallon tank.

I arrived at Camp Claiborne in good shape and found out that the unit I had been assigned to be essentially a holding unit until the Army in their wisdom, found a spot for me. After about two weeks orders came through transferring me to the 554th Heavy Pontoon

Battalion located at Camp Swift, Texas which was located about 50 miles south of Austin, the state capital. I was scheduled to report on a Monday. It was not much of a trip from Claiborne to Swift and I arrived in Austin late Saturday afternoon. Decided to check out the town before reporting, I checked into a motel, went to a dance given by the USO and drove out to Camp Swift on Sunday.

Finally found the HQ building of the 554th to report for duty. A medical officer was at the Duty Officers desk when I reported in. He told me he was just filling in for the Duty Officer, a Captain Linden, who had stepped out for a moment. I asked, "Captain Linden. Is he a short red headed officer?" He replied, "See for yourself. He's coming in the back door." I looked and there was Lindy, my platoon leader from basic training at Camp Shelby. He raised hell with me for not reporting sooner. He had seen my name on a list of officers available at Camp Claiborne and had requested me for the 554th. It was a great reunion, Lindy and I got along real well. The unit had not as yet received its full complement of men so training had not yet started. It took about another week before the Battalion had gotten all their men...

Then training started in full swing. The operations of a heavy Pontoon battalion had been touched on very briefly in OCS, so it was a learning process for me. I had to hit the manuals real hard before trying to teach the troops. Lucky for me they had to be taught the basics like marching, care and maintenance of an M-1 before we got into the skills needed to put together a floating bridge using the heavy aluminum pontoons and bridging material that tied everything together. That gave me time to study the manuals so I knew what I was talking about when I got in front of my platoon.

We had only been working together for about a month when the Army in their wisdom, decided to make a change in the line of command for the Corps of Engineers in the Army Corps. Originally the Corps Engineer had direct control over all engineer troops in Corps. This was a difficult job as he had to be aware of the capabilities of at least 6 Engineer Battalions that served as back up for a 4 Infantry Division front plus all the supporting troops that were involved in the basic Corps operation. The change that was decided on was to create 2 intermediate Engineer groups, each one responsible for backing up two Divisions. They would have command over all the troops necessary for this mission. Composition of the Engineer groups would vary be the mission involved. Under this setup, the Corps Engineer would only have to give orders to the Commanders of the two engineer groups and they would designate the mission of the troops under their command.

Suddenly I received orders transferring me to 19th Corps, 1115th engineer Combat Group, where I was assigned to HQ Company. This was a whole new ball game. The CO of our group was a full Colonel, a regular Army Officer who operated strictly by the book. Compared to my previous experience, this man was tough as nails, but once you got to know him, he was fair.

All for now. Will continue ASAP.

World War II Stories – Sunday, August 28, 2005 1:39 PM

Made an error in my last transmission, the POE we, as advance party was sent to, was Fort Hamilton, not Fort Jay. The location was correct but not the name. Sorry about that, but you must forgive an old man's memory. It's not as good as it used to be.

During our stay in Fort Hamilton, life was easy. All we had to do was report for reveille every morning and if our unit was not alerted for overseas, we had the rest of the day to do whatever we wanted including leaving the post as long as we were back the next morning for reveille. If our unit was alerted, the lid was clamped down. We were restricted to the base, no phone calls, we could not contact anyone.

As soon as we were settled in, I called home and the following morning my Dad drove down to the post and took me home. I would spend every day with my folks and was given the use of the family car to travel back and forth to the base every day. I told the folks about what would happen if I had the car at the base when our unit was alerted. The car would be impounded, which meant that Dad would have to come down to the base and go through a lot of red tape to get it out of the lot. Dad said this was no hardship as the use of the car allowed me to spend all my time with them and that was reward enough for the slight inconvenience of picking up the car.

This problem never developed. We had been at the POE for about 10 days when I realized the following Saturday was a meeting of an organization that I belonged to. This monthly meeting was held at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City. It would be foolish to use the car so I left the car at home on Saturday afternoon and went to the meeting in NYC by train. After the meeting I met Mom, who had been in town with some women's group. Said goodbye and went back to the base. We were alerted the next morning for shipment out on Monday. I never did get to say goodbye to Dad, something I regret to this day, because I never saw him again. I got the impression that he thought I knew I was going to be alerted and that was the reason I left the car home. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We got our stuff packed and delivered to the pick-up point. At about midnight we were loaded on a lighter that held about 30 men. They took off from Fort Hamilton, cruised Lord only knows where for about 2 hours, changing direction and speed constantly until at last we pulled up alongside a hatch in the side of a large boat. Everything was black as pitch as all NYC was blacked out. We offloaded to the boat and were directed to our quarters. My bunk was 1 of 6 in the room I had been assigned. In the morning the Lt in the bunk next to mine was moaning as if he was going to die. I spoke to him and he told me that this was the first time he had ever been on a boat and he was seasick.

Told him I was going to breakfast and asked if he wanted me to bring him anything. He merely moaned some more and said no. Finally found the mess hall, had breakfast, then decided to try to find out where we were. All the windows or portholes were painted out and an MP was stationed at every door leading to the deck so that no one could go outside. Got into conversation with one of the MP's and finally found out that the ship we were on was the Britannic, a ship belonging to Great Britain, which had been converted to a troop carrier.

We were tied up to a pier at 57th St on the Hudson River. He also told me that this was the first time the Britannic was traveling in convoy. She was fast enough to travel alone and outrun any submarine she detected.

When I told my roommate the fact we hadn't left the dock as yet, he wouldn't believe me. He knew he was seasick and nothing I told him would convince him otherwise. I roamed around the ship. She must have been beautiful but not much could be seen of the decor because the walls were all protected with plywood panels to protect them from damage.

The trip was uneventful, except for several days when we ran into heavy weather. Our position in the convoy was close to the center. The battleship Texas was about three ships in front of us, to port [left] we had two Liberty ships *and* to starboard an oil tanker and a ship loaded with munitions. This was not, to my thinking, a very safe place to be. In the heavy weather it was amusing to watch the two Liberty ships as they appeared to be loaded differently. On one tack, the one in front rode beautifully while the one behind it would bury her prow into the seas and the water would cascade over her deck and off the stern. On board our ship the saying went around that the submarine watch on the 2nd Liberty ship was equipped with diving gear because they were underwater most of the time.

Then the convoy would change course and the way the two ships rode would be reversed. The one in front would now roll from side to side to such an extent that we thought it would continue to roll until it capsized, while the other ship rode beautifully. The one in front always recovered but I would not have wanted to be assigned to either of those ships.

During this weather, one of the destroyers, that was normally on the outside of the convoy for protection, pulled alongside the oil tanker to refuel. During the refueling process the convoy got a submarine alert. The oil lines were disconnected and thrown over the side still spewing oil and the destroyer took off at flank speed. She pulled forward until she cleared the prow of the tanker, turned 90 degrees to cross in front. On this heading, she was taking the seas broadside which caused her to roll from side to side. The mast seemed to go through an arc of 90 degrees. I would not have wanted to be on that ship either, at least not in weather like it was and the heading and speed that the destroyer was making.

The submarine was either sunk or decided that discretion was the better part of valor and went away to hunt some easier prey. The rest of the trip was uneventful and we finally docked in Liverpool. We offloaded and were transported to a small town of Kingston Deverill, which was located south of Salisbury and the Bath-London highway.

Now the work of the advance party began. We had to obtain basic supplies in order to operate and get the assigned buildings ready for the arrival of the rest of the unit. Vehicles were the first order of business so that we could get around. As I recall, we got a ¾ ton truck, a 2½ ton Jimmy [GMC] 6x6 and a Jeep.

This is as good a place to stop as any, so I'll call it quits. To be continued.

Sent: Sunday, September 18, 2005 6:55 PM

The task of getting our assigned area ready for the rest of the unit seemed to go very slowly. We thought we would never get it done in time for the arrival of the balance of our unit. However, things started to fall into place and it turned out, in spite of our fears, that we had two whole days to spare before the unit arrived. The Manor House that had been assigned to us was, as I remember it, constructed of stone, two stories high with a fireplace in each room for heat. One of the main problems that winter [1943-1944] was keeping warm.

We were not used to a damp cold, which seemed to penetrate through any amount of clothing one would wear right down to the bone. At night the cold seemed to come up from the floor, penetrate the canvas cot and sleeping bag until we found out that a multiple thickness of newspaper beneath the sleeping bag would do wonders toward stopping the cold from penetrating.

Our days were spent in honing the skills necessary to make the Group a smooth functioning unit and becoming acquainted with our assigned units and their personnel. This was a never ending job, but a necessary one if we were to accomplish our assigned tasks..

A few incidents happened during our stay in Kingston Deverill that, to me at least were interesting. Some of the stories I will relate here and in future installments, happened to me. Others come second hand.

One winter day I was traveling in my Jeep, which had been equipped with plywood side panels and Plexiglas windows to keep out the cold. It was cold and both the driver and I were bundled up in our woolen OD uniforms, Tanker pile lined jacket, long woolen underwear and pile lined overcoat. This was a weekday and we saw this schoolboy walking to school wearing nothing but short pants, knee sox and a long sleeved jacket. Just looking at him made us feel all the colder. To this day I don't know how one could get used to that type of cold.

The Armored Divisions were equipped with a Tank recovery vehicle designated as the M-25. This vehicle had an armored cab equipped with a hinged piece of steel that could be dropped down to cover the windshield when they came under fire. When this was in place, the driver looked through a periscope to maneuver the vehicle. The trailer behind the cab was equipped with a winch capable of hauling a disabled medium tank up onto the trailer. The trailer could hold two medium tanks. This vehicle was a monster. You can imagine the difficulty driving this vehicle on the left side of the narrow English roads. One day, one of these M-25's was going down a hill that had a 90degree turn at the bottom. An estate on the left side of the road was behind a stone wall. As the M-25 was going down the hill, the engine stalled for some unknown reason. Without the engine, the power steering was useless and the turn was too close to stop. The driver dropped the steel shield, held onto the wheel and prayed. They went through the wall and ended up on the lawn. Damage to the M-25 was considerable. The driver and his assistant were lucky; one of them got hit on the head by a can of "C" rations that fell off the shelf behind them.

I forgot to mention that on the "BRITANNIC" were a contingent of 30-40 British young women, returning home after attending a seminar or something in the states. Needless to say they didn't lack for company on the trip across. It was very interesting to talk to them and hear about life in Great Britain. One expression I will never forget. As we came to the parting of ways in Liverpool, they gave us their addresses and phone numbers and said, "Knock me up sometime." We found out later that this meant to call them on the phone. I spent a

weekend in London at the house of one of these women. Her family was very gracious and friendly. We went out on the town, got caught in a bombing raid, went to a shelter and then home. Came away with a much better understanding of what the British people went through than I could ever have gotten by reading the newspaper.

About the middle of March, Col. Underwood, our CO got orders transferring him to be co-commander of the First Engineer Special Brigade. This was a unit whose job was to hit the beaches in Normandy before the infantry and clear out a path through the underwater obstacles, hedgehogs and minefields so that the Infantry would have a better chance of getting to the beach. In his place we got a Col. Shuler, who, if I'm not mistaken, played football for West Point. Col. Shuler was an entirely different type officer than Col. Underwood in that he was not the strict disciplinarian that Col. Underwood was, but in his quiet way accomplished the same. Col. Underwood was strictly "By the book", while Col. Shuler told you what he wanted and was not interested in how you did it as long as the end result was what was wanted.

As days went by we knew we were approaching "D" day. All the vehicles except the two motorcycles were waterproofed for the crossing. Once they had been waterproofed they could only be driven a short distance [like from our location to the "DOWNS", onto the LST and off the ship] This meant that all errands had to be done on the motorcycles. I learned how to operate one of them fast. I will never forget picking up a spare truck battery at a supply depot and bringing it back tied to the luggage rack on the back of the bike. Haven't ridden a motorcycle since then and truthfully, I'm not anxious to.

We finally got orders to move out and go to the Downs prior to loading for the trip across the channel to France. While waiting for the orders to load, we had nothing to do but wait. We were told to get all the rest and sleep we could get because once we started across those two things would be in short supply. It didn't take long to get in the habit of sleeping late and resting. One morning the cooks came through the area shaking everyone by the shoulder with the news, "Get up and come to breakfast. We have "Real" eggs." Most of the outfit didn't believe them, rolled over and went back to sleep.

I got up and found out the cooks weren't kidding. Those of us that did get up had a ball. We went through that breakfast line several times having our eggs cooked a different way each time we went through.

We had been on the Downs about a week when the orders came to load. The cycles went in the back of one of the 6X6's and we loaded on board. The trip across the Channel was uneventful. One thing I'll never forget was that the entire trip was spent in the Officer's Ward Room, drinking coffee and eating "Real White Bread" toasted with butter. It's amazing how the simple things make such an impression on the memory. One thing about the Navy, the food sure was better than what we got in the Army.

As we approached the beach and got ready to disembark, we were told "If you hear a plane, don't bother to look up. It will be one of ours." They were so right. This held true all through Europe. I never saw a German plane in the air.

Those first few days we were jammed together in the beach head, Our unit was sandwiched between an artillery unit and a small plane landing strip. We dug our foxholes but sleeping in them was difficult. We were so close to the artillery unit that when they fired the guns, the earth vibrated and dirt would shower down on us from the walls of the foxhole. After a few days the beachhead expanded and we were able to spread out more and get away from that artillery unit.

I had developed an infection on the back of my neck. The Surgeon in our Medical Detachment thought I'd be better off in the hospital, so I was transferred there.

The Germans decided to make a stand in the town of St. Lo. They had located the observation tower for their artillery in the church steeple as they assumed we would not bomb the church. They were right, when the bombers finished with St. Lo, the only building left standing was the church. I was in the hospital at the time the Air Force got the orders to wipe out St. Lo. The staff of the hospital moved our cots outside the tent so we could see the show.

It was fantastic! As far as the eye could see, all you could see was one formation of bombers after another. B-17's, B-24's, Lancasters, All different types would pass overhead, as they approached St. Lo, the bomb bay doors would open, the bombs would drop and the formation would close the bomb bay doors and head back to England for another load. The fighters were riding shotgun although there were no German fighters to be seen. This went on until St. Lo was leveled.

The next day I had a visit from Col. Shuler and Major Braden [our surgeon]. They came to me and asked if I thought I could travel. The infection on my neck had cleared up a bit, so I said yes. They told me that we had gotten orders to move and they didn't want to lose me in the shuffle. They signed me out and we went back to

the unit. Based on what happened next, I'm glad they got me out of the hospital when they did or I think I would have been lost to the unit and Lord only knows where I would have ended up.

Have to go back a bit. I just thought of something that happened to me while we were still in England. During a slow period a group of the men got together and we decided to play a bit of baseball. I was playing third base, the "Hot Corner" when a grounder was hit toward me. I misjudged it and caught the ball on the end of the finger next to the pinky. It hurt like the devil so I went to see Doc Braden.

He looked at it and tried to straighten it as it was bent to the left at the first knuckle. I wore a splint for about a week to no avail. I have my "War Injury" to this day. If a German plane had been passing overhead and the injury had drawn blood, I could have claimed a Purple Heart but that was not the case.

{To be continued}.

Sent: **Sunday, January 22, 2006 1:43 PM**

I must go back, as I have remembered some stories that occurred in the Normandy area. The Infantry encountered some difficulty going in what we called "Hedge Row Country". The entire area was divided into plots owned by the individual farmers. These plots were surrounded on all sides by mounds of earth about 3'-4' high which were topped with dense hedges that were allowed to grow wild. This structure was practically impenetrable except for a small opening for the farmer to go in to cultivate his crops.

This structure formed a perfect defense position for the German troops. They could fire through the hedgerow to stop our advance, then, drop back to the next row under covering fire to start the process all over again. Something had to be done to provide our troops with an entry through the hedgerow.

Someone came up with the idea of using tanks to open a hole for the Infantry. To do this a section of steel pipe about 10" in diameter was welded to the skirts on both sides of the tank. This pipe was the diameter of a prepared explosive "Catering Charge", weighing about 20 lbs. and used by the Engineers to blast craters in roads. Troops would follow the tank with these charges. When the tank rammed into the hedgerow and backed off, one charge would be placed in each hole and the fuse pulled. When the charges went off, they would leave a hole in the hedgerow wide enough for the tank to go through.

The tank would then pull up through the opening, spray the opposite end of the field with machine gun and cannon fire, pinning down the enemy so our troops could advance. This method worked very well throughout the "Hedgerow Country" and enabled our troops to continue to advance without too much trouble.

This area of France was Apple Country. One of the products was a potent brandy going by the name, as I recall, of Calvados, a form of what we call "Applejack" Based on things that later developed, our troops must have found the distillery and laid in quite a supply because Calvados kept appearing long after we left Normandy.

St. Lo was a shambles after the saturation bombing noted in previous episodes. Debris from the building was 8'-12' high in the streets making the roads impossible to use. St. Lo was a major transportation hub, with 3 main highways crossing the city. The Engineers were given the task to provide access through the city. It was decided to create a huge one way traffic circle around the outskirts to connect all three highways. Traffic entering the city from any direction would turn right on the traffic circle until they came to the road they wished to continue on. At this point they would turn right again and be on their way.

In retrospect, this decision could have been the fore-runner of the Beltway Design that has been applied to quite a few of our cities here in the States.

The next stop on our tour of France was Mortain. This happened fast and left the forward Engineer Dumps far to the rear. They had to be moved rapidly in order to keep the front line Division Engineer troops supply base intact. As a stop gap measure, a convoy for each dump was formed. I was put on detached service to Corps HQ, given about 20 2 1/2 ton 6x6 trucks and drivers with orders to move one of the dumps to its new location.

We got the dump moved to its new location on time, without incident. It was decided to keep this system of moving the dumps for all future moves. I enjoyed the change of pace and was put on the list to head up this type of operation in the future as the need arose.

Our forces were held up at this point for quite some time. To keep the troops busy, it was decided to build Bailey bridges across the Vire River, a small stream varying from 30' to 50' wide. Don't recall how many bridges were built, but they came in handy later on.

Will call it quits at this point and will try to get the next episode out shortly.

Sent: Sunday, June 08, 2008 5:38 PM – STORIES OF WW II, LIQUOR CACHE

This story is the follow up of the one concerning The Trailer Mounted Generators.

The finishing comment in the Generator episode was that Major Cocky, Asst. Corps Engineer, owed me “Big Time” was fulfilled a few weeks later. I received a call from Major Cocky asking me to come to Corp HQ with two 21/2 ton trucks equipped with winches with the additional comment, “Don’t ask any questions.”

When I got to Corp HQ, Major Cocky told me that a cache of liquor had been discovered on one of the many German estates and our Group had been allocated 150 cases. It had been discovered by two GI’s roaming the estate and upon seeing what looked like a tool shed in the middle of a field. Investigation revealed that the shed was enclosing an elevator to 5 interconnected storage rooms stacked floor to ceiling with every imaginable type of liquor you could think of, Beer, Wine, Scotch, Rye, Bourbon—You name it, it was there. The German’s in their wisdom had lowered the elevator to the bottom of the shaft and cut the cable. All that was necessary to make the elevator operable was to attach the winch cable to the elevator cable and back up the truck.

I had enough men with me to leave half of them topside to load and take the rest below to load the elevator. We proceeded to select the liquor we wanted and sent load after load to the top where it was loaded into the second truck. After a while the Sgt. In charge topside came down and asked, “Do we have the 150 cases yet? My answer was, I thought you were counting. What is the situation?” He answered, “The first truck is loaded and we’re working on the second one.” I told him we would bring up the one load on the elevator and finish up.

When I got topside there were three units waiting for their shot at the cache. When we got back to our unit and unloaded, we had 250 cases of liquor. At the time, our Group had two Engineer Battalions, two Bridge Companies and a Maintenance Platoon attached. Col. Shuler, our CO, decided that the only fair way to distribute the liquor was on the basis of the number of companies.

The normal strength of an Engineer company was between 250-340 men. Our unit the Group and Hq. Company, totaled about 50-60 men but we were a Company so we made out like a bandit. Along the way of our trip through Europe, the medical Section of our unit had liberated a 4 wheeled trailer for their equipment. There was excess space in the trailer so it was decided to store our allotment of liquor in the trailer.

The rules for distribution were simple.

1. Anytime you wanted a bottle, it was yours.
2. Don’t get caught drunk.
3. If that happened, the remaining liquor supply would be distributed to our attached units.

Needless to say, no one was ever caught drunk. If that happened, your buddies would cover for you and get you out of sight so that Rule #4 above was never broken. I will say that the men were careful about the use of liquor and never got themselves in a condition where the ability to operate was impaired.

Trailer Mounted Generators

During periods when we were in a static position, part of my job as Assistant S-4, was to take the Jeep and the S-4 Technical Sergeant and scout the area for material or equipment that could be used by our group or the attached organizations to good advantage. This is the story of one of those trips.

One day while driving in our open Jeep, it started to rain so hard that the windshield wipers couldn’t keep the glass clear enough to clearly see where we were going, needless to say, we were getting soaking wet. So we looked for a place to pull off the road into shelter. Finally saw what looked like a series of attached garages built in a “U” shaped building with an office at one end. There was no sign of activity anywhere in the compound, so we pulled in, parked and tried the door to the office. The door was unlocked, so we entered and found the place in a shamble as if the occupants had left in a hurry.

There were several chairs in the office, so we sat down to wait for the rain to stop. Got bored after a while and started looking around. Noticed a door in the side wall leading to the garage structures and decided to see where it went. Upon opening the door we found that, instead of a garage, we were looking at an assembly line for trailer mounted 10 KW generators. Following the production line to the end of the “U” shaped building, we found 10 completed generators ready for delivery.

The rain had stopped by this time, so I left the Sgt. In charge of the installation while I took the Jeep and went looking for a military unit with telephone connection to 19th Corps, through which I could contact my unit. Found a unit about a mile down the road and got permission to make the call. Making

a call of this type in an open office of a strange unit put me in a difficult position. I knew if I mentioned the word “Generators”, the unit from which I was making the call would be all over me to find out where they were. Equipment of this type was in very short supply and units without them would do anything to obtain one.

I finally got through to my units switchboard and asked for Col. Shuler. Luckily he was in his office and my call was put through. I identified myself and said “Colonel, please don’t ask any questions. I gave him my location and asked that he send me 10 ¾ ton trucks with good pintle hooks” He did ask a few questions that could be answered “Yes’ or “No” and then said “The trucks will be there in one hour”.

When the trucks arrived, I led them back to the compound. We hooked up the generators, one to each truck and proceeded in convoy back to our unit.

Col. Shuler had been waiting to see what I had found. He took me into his office and wanted the whole story after which the decision was made as to how they would be distributed. We kept one for our unit and 8 were distributed where they would do the most good. The remaining one, I suggested giving to the Corps Engineer Section as it never hurt to build up brownie points.

Due to the fact that contact with Corps in this particular area was usually handled by me, the Col. suggested I make the call. A Major Cocky was the Asst. Corps Engineer and he and I got along very well. I called him and asked, “Major, how would you like a trailer mounted 10 KW generator?” I could tell from his reaction, the question almost knocked him out of his chair. His answer was, “Wolf, where the hell did you get something like that?” My reply was, “If you’re going to ask questions like that, I’ll find someone else who don’t ask questions.” Hearing that, he quickly calmed down and asked where it was located and how soon he could send a truck to pick it up. Arrangements were made and he had his generator within an hour. As he was leaving, I told him that he owed me “big time”.

A bit of an explanation as to how our unit made use of our generator. Early on in the war, every time we made camp, the various units, [S-1,S-2,S-3,S-4, the medics and the motor pool all ended up in different locations making it time consuming to run telephone lines connecting all sections to the switchboard. S-3, the planning section, came up with the idea to borrow a 27 1/2 ton truck from the battalions for each section. Their office would be arranged in the body of the truck and they would have the same assigned spot in each of the locations every time we moved. By doing this, the Signal section made up the different lengths of telephone wire to connect each section to the switchboard. In this way we could be in operation within an hour. We did the same with connections to the new generator.

The generator worked out fine, giving us the capability to work at night without having to use the gasoline lanterns that were Government Issue.

The gift to Corps Engineer section paid dividends as will be related in a future story.

Sent: Tuesday, June 10, 2008 5:38 PM – WORLD WAR II STORIES APRICOT BRANDY

While in a static position near Magdeburg, Germany, we found a small cache of apricot brandy. My allocation was three bottles. One of the things that my wife, Anita, enjoyed was apricot brandy, so I decided to send one of the bottles to her. Regulations frowned on shipping the likes of this through the mail. I came up with the following.

I obtained an empty can from the kitchen that had contained “SPAM”. These tins held 5 lbs of SPAM and, if my memory is right, were about 4” square and about 14” long. A key was used to twist off a strip of metal so the end could be removed to get out the contents. I cleaned it out real good and padded the bottom with paper. I did not want the contents to gurgle, so I removed the cork, filled the space with about a jigger of water and replaced the cork. I filled the corners with paper to cushion the bottle then took it down to the motor pool and had them solder the metal end back in place.

I had written Anita telling her to expect a package that I thought she would enjoy. Couldn’t tell her what was in it I wrapped it and sent it on its way. A few weeks later I got a letter from her telling me the package had arrived and how thankful they were to get it. They were saving it for a special occasion. All this without either one of us mentioning what was in the package.

A few weeks went by and I received a letter that ripped me up one side and down the other. It seems the can had been labeled by the manufacturer as to its contents. Briefly it said ‘’SPAM 5 LBS’’. I had completely forgotten about the meat rationing they were subject to. When they opened the wrapping and saw the printing

on the can they thought it was meat and were saving it for a Sunday dinner when their ration coupons had run out. I was glad I was in Germany and not anywhere near the house in Jamaica, N.Y. when they opened that package

Guess it's the old story that no good deed goes unpunished.

Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2013 4:26 PM – WORLD WAR II STORIES – BASTONGE

At long last I've gotten back to the stories of WW II. Forgive me for the long delay.

The Army had a large Engineer H heavy Equipment dump in Liege, Belgium which was in short supply of Large Bulldozers, Road Graders and Shovels. A similar dump in Bastogne had an oversupply. I was put on detached service from my unit [1115th Engineer C Group] to the 19th Corp, given a fleet of 20 2 1/2 ton trucks equipped with large flatbed trailers and orders to proceed to the Bastogne dump, pick up as much equipment as the trailers would hold and return to the dump in Liege.

The trip down to Bastogne was uneventful. We loaded the equipment on the trailers and proceeded to return to Liege. Our speed when loaded was about 10 MPH except on hills where we would drop to about 5. We had been on the road about an hour, going up a hill, when I heard the sound of Tanks coming toward us. I went forward in my Jeep to find out what was up. As I approached the lead tank they stopped and I asked the tank commander, who was standing in the open hatch of the tank, "What's up?"

He looked at me then at my convoy of trucks and equipment and asked, "Where did you come from?" I told him we had left Bastogne about an hour ago. He then told me about the German breakthrough and the isolation of Bastogne. We were lucky to get clear before it happened.

We continued to the dump in Liege and unloaded the equipment. Personnel at the dump were in the process of wiring explosives to all the equipment in the dump so that it could be destroyed if the Germans succeeded and in their breakthrough and came close to Liege.

Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2013 10:52 PM – General

I think it would be informative if I gave you some general information about our unit and its position in the general scheme of things. We were Corp troops whose duty was to provide support services to the Divisions who were in actual contact with the enemy. Originally, the Corp Engineer, who had a 4 Division front, assigned the various Engineer troops under his command to the various tasks in support of the 4 divisions. To keep track of the needs and capabilities of the units under his command was a tremendous job so the idea of intermediate units called "Engineer Groups" was formed. The composition of these units varied with the task of the divisions.

Each group was responsible for a two division front so that the Corp Engineer only had to deal with the commanders of two groups who, in turn, gave the orders to the troops under their command to support the two division front they were responsible for.

To give you some idea of the work involved, our G group, the 1115th Engineer Combat Group, during the course of the war from Omaha Beach to the Elbe River performed the following tasks and supported the following organizations.

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED:

2 nd Armored Division	8 th Infantry Division	79 th Infantry Division
3 rd Armored Division	28 th Infantry Division	83 rd Infantry Division
7 th Armored Division	29 th Infantry Division	95 th Infantry Division
8 th Armored Division	30 th Infantry Division	102 nd Infantry Division
5 th Infantry Division	104 th Infantry Division	78 th Infantry Division
113 th Cavalry Group		

TASKS PERFORMED

6,000 Mines Removed; 11,394,460 gallons of water supplied; 6,000 Miles of road maintained; 64,365 cubic yards of rock, sand, gravel, rubble and cinders hauled; 100 bridges built totaling 10,928 feet, one of which was over 1,000 feet long.

Sent: **Thursday, January 17, 2013 2:48 PM – St LO.**

This story is one at the early days of our tour through Europe. We were being held up by strong German resistance at the town of St. Lo. The Germans had established an observation base for their artillery in a church tower, rightly assuming that our bombers and artillery would not destroy it. St. Lo was an important hub for three highways in the road system that crossed in it.

I had developed an infection [a boil] in my neck and had been hospitalized at a base hospital North of St. Lo when the decision was made by the General Headquarters to eliminate St. Lo. When that day came, being advised as to what would happen, the hospital personnel moved all patients that were ambulatory to the outside of the hospital tents to see the show.

AND WHAT A SHOW IT WAS.

In the sky, back as far as we could see was a stream of bombers [Lancaster's, Fortresses and others that I could not recognize]. All protected by flights of fighter planes of all descriptions even though there wasn't a German Plane in the sky. As they passed over the hospital, at what looked like about 1,000 feet, they would open their bomb bay doors for their bomb run. A bit further on their trip we could see the bombs drop. They would then circle around for the trip back to England to pick up another load of bombs and repeat the procedure over again.

The day after that show, Col. Shuler, my Group Commander, and Major Braden, the Group surgeon, appeared at my cot side. All they wanted to know is, "Did I think was able to travel?" The reason being was that a move in our Group position was coming up shortly and they didn't want to lose me in the shuffle. Of course the answer was, "Yes." I was released from the Hospital and left with the Col. and the Maj. to rejoin the Group.