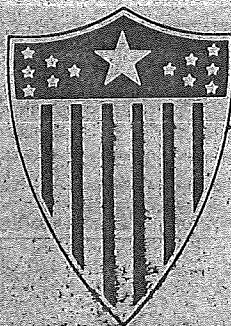


**WAR DEPARTMENT**  
**THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE**  
**WASHINGTON**

(3918)  
Major

History - 555th Eng Bn  
Pentagon Bn



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## HISTORY

of

### 555TH ENGINEER HEAVY PONTON BATTALION

The 555th Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion was activated on March 1, 1945 at Camp White, Oregon with a cadre furnished by the 181st Heavy Ponton Battalion with additional officers from other units. The unit was commanded and staffed at the inception of basic training by the following:

Emery M. Sipprelle, Major OE, Commanding  
Jack W. R. Lemery, Major OE, Executive Officer  
Robert T. Campbell, 2nd Lt OE, Adjutant  
Joseph H. Mixner, 2nd Lt OE, S2-3  
Fenton C. Heninger Jr. Captain OE, S-4 & H & S Co Comdr  
Marion J. Perry, 1st Lt OE, Commanding "A" Company  
Howard G. Haake, 1st Lt OE, Commanding "B" Company

Basic training was begun on 22 March 1943 with 494 recruits from the reception center at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. With very few exceptions, the enlisted strength of the command was recruited from Illinois and Wisconsin. During the basic period, in addition to the normal military subjects, extensive and continuous training was given in the primary mission of the unit. This training included the construction of heavy ponton bridges, and footbridges on the swift and treacherous Rogue River. Concurrent with bridge construction, rafting, ferrying and stormboating technique was perfected on Lake Immigrant. The period of basic training was completed on 12 June 1943 and the Training Test, conducted by IV Corps, given on 21/22 June. To complete the test, Companies "A" and "B" constructed the Heavy Ponton Bridge on the Rogue River at Grant's Pass and H & S Company constructed the footbridge on Little Butte Creek, both problems under tactical conditions. All units were awarded a Superior rating by the inspecting officers. Administration, supply and basic subjects were given ratings of excellent. A general rating of Excellent was given together with a Corps commendation.

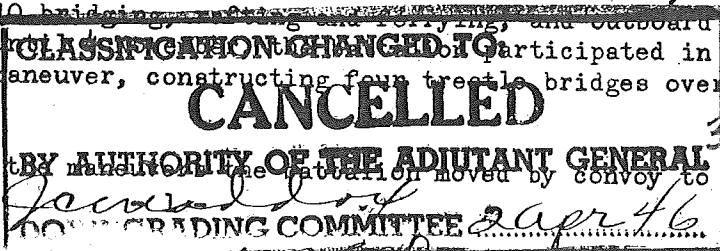
The period from June 25 to August 4, 1943 was chiefly spent in the field furthering bridging technique.

On August 4/5, the battalion was given the annual general inspection by the Inspector General of IV Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington and received the rating Excellent.

On August 14, Company B left Camp White enroute to Maneuver Area, Bend, Oregon, to establish a site for a Ponton Bridge School to be conducted by the battalion. Companies "A" and H & S were given the Physical Fitness Test at Camp White on 17 August 1943 and scored 85.6.

The battalion moved by convoy to Maneuver Area, Bend, Oregon on 25 August and joined "B" Company at the Ponton Bridge School established on the Deschutes River. During the period 26 August to 18 October 1943, the battalion conducted a Ponton School for all combat engineer units in the maneuver area, instructing in ponton and H-10 bridging, rafting, ferrying, and outboard motor operation. From 19 October until the maneuver ended, the battalion participated in the 7th and 8th problems of the maneuver, constructing four trestle bridges over the Deschutes River.

Upon completion of the maneuver the battalion moved by convoy to Fort



Lewis, Washington, arriving there 5 November 1943. From this time until 8 January 1944, the battalion was engaged in the rehabilitation of equipment and the furtherance of technical training. During the time, enlisted men of the unit were sent to the following service schools:

Camouflage School, Fort Belvoir, Virginia  
Water Purification School, Fort Belvoir, Virginia  
Motorboat School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
Automotive, Blacksmith and Sheetmetal Schools, Atlanta, Georgia  
Tractor Mechanic School, Omaha, Nebraska  
Radio School, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey  
Electrical School, New York City.

On January 8, 1944, the battalion left Fort Lewis by train for Imperial Dam, California, where it was attached to the Bridge Section of the Engineer Board. The unit was stationed here from 11 January until 27 August, the entire period being devoted to the testing and development of new equipment for the Corps of Engineers. During this time, tests were conducted in various types of fixed and floating bridging, deep well digging and operation, transportation for desert warfare and all preliminary tests - service, wear and debris - on the Army Floating Bridge, M1. Upon the successful completion of this mission, the battalion moved by train to Camp Polk, Louisiana.

From 31 August to October 15, an intensive training program in preparation for overseas movement was conducted.

On October 15, Company A, plus detachments from the other companies moved to Burr Ferry, Louisiana, to conduct the final service tests on the Army Floating Bridge M1 and transportation equipment. On October 30, B Company moved to Orange, Texas to conduct tests with rafting and ferrying operations, using Army Floating Bridge M1 equipment. Also tested were power, storm and assault boats, cableways, cable launchers, front-loading trailers, range finders and smoke generating equipment. This period was culminated by a final three day test of all equipment on the Sabine River. This test was witnessed by the President of the Engineer Board and representatives of Army Ground Forces; the Chief Engineer, Engineer School, Fourth Army and XXI Corps. As a result of the test, the Sipprelle Balk Depressing Tool, designed by Lt Col E. M. Sipprelle and the Curb Balk Adapter, designed by Staff Sergeant John P Meyers, were adopted for use with the bridge.

Following the bridge tests, the period from 19 November 1944 to 28 January 1945 was spent in intensive training and processing of equipment for overseas shipment.

On 29 January, the unit moved by rail to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to receive final training prior to moving overseas. On 16 February, the battalion boarded the S.S. Mariposa at New York City and sailed for England two days later. The anchor was dropped at Liverpool on 26 February and the unit entrained for Camp Chiseldon on 27 February, arriving at the new station the same day.

The period 27 February to 13 March was spent in the orientation of the troops in preparation for a combat mission. Then, on 13 March the unit boarded the S.S. Antenor, bound for France. Due to weather conditions, debarkation was delayed one day but, on 15 March, the battalion debarked at Le Harve and boarded trucks for Auffay, France.

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Work was started immediately on processing and assembling vehicles and equipment in preparation for a combat mission. It is worthy of note, that through herculean efforts, this task, normally a six weeks undertaking was accomplished in five days.

On 23 March, the battalion departed by convoy for Germany. The first day the unit traveled 160 miles, bivouacing at Rheims. 140 miles were covered on the second day with a bivouac at Sarguemines on the German border. With 120 miles traveled the third day, the battalion arrived at Borstadt, Germany and received its first mission.

The mission of the unit, attached to XV Corps for the Rhine River crossings was for "A" Company to establish a heavy ponton bridge dump with its organic equipment, at Standenbuhl in support of the 1553 Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion whose mission was to cross the Rhine River at Rhein-Durkheim, Germany. Headquarters and Service Company assisted "A" Company in the establishment of the bridge dump. "B" Company, likewise, established a dump at Langmeil, Germany in support of the 85 Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion whose mission was the crossing of the Rhine River at Worms, Germany. In addition to the operation of the dumps, the line companies were sent to St. Jean K, France, to pick up floating bridge loads. The convoys departed on 26 March 1945 and, though many difficulties were encountered due to heavy traffic and a badly damaged road network, succeeded in loading equipment and returning to their base on 28 March 1945.

On 30 March 1945, "A" Company was attached to XV Corps and moved to the vicinity of Babenhausen, Germany to await orders for the construction of a 420 foot Class 40 bridge. On 31 March 1945, with the assistance of Headquarters and Service Company, "A" Company moved to Gross Wallstadt and constructed the bridge. Considerable difficulty was encountered in construction due to the rise and fall of the Main River at this point. Upon completion, the company was charged with the guard and maintenance of the bridge and, in addition assisted the 40th Engineer Combat Battalion in the construction of a fixed bridge at the same site. This entire mission was completed 16 April 1945.

Meanwhile, the rest of the battalion was attached to XXI Corps with the mission of constructing a bridge at Heidelberg, Germany. "B" Company moved to Heidelberg and constructed a Class 40 bridge on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945. At the same time, Headquarters and Headquarters and Service Company were established in Ladenburg, Germany. The maintenance of the Heidelberg bridge was turned over to the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion on 5 April 1945 and the battalion less "A" Company moved to Heppenheim, Germany on this date, being attached to the 1175th Engineer Combat Group.

On 5 April 1945, "B" Company departed for Kirchardt, Germany with the mission of supporting VI Corps in river crossing operations to take place at Heilbronn, Germany. Stiff enemy resistance precluded the immediate crossing and it was not until the night of 9 April 1945, that a bridgehead of sufficient size had been taken to make ferrying operations possible. A three boat reinforced raft was built by hand and ferrying operations were started at 0730 on the morning of April 10, 1945. Tanks and other heavy equipment were ferried successfully until 1230 when the raft was hit by artillery fire, damaging the raft and wounding three men. A half hour later the raft was again hit, this time wounding Lieutenant Dancy and sinking the

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raft. Operations were halted until the night of 12 April 1945 when the near shore abutment and trestle span for a Class 40 bridge was constructed. The bridge was completed and opened to traffic on 13 April 1945.

On 16 April, "A" Company, assisted by Headquarters and Service Company, dismantled the bridge at Gross Wallstadt and moved to Markt-Heidenfeld, Germany, where construction was begun immediately on another Class 40 bridge. This bridge was completed and maintenance and traffic control furnished until 21 April 1945. Meanwhile, Headquarters and Headquarters and Service Company moved to Walldurn, Germany. During the period 17 April to 21 April inclusive, both lettered companies were completely reequipped from the bridge dump at Worms, Germany. During this period, Headquarters and Service Company and "A" Company moved to Heilbronn, Germany joining "B" Company there.

The battalion, less a maintenance detail from "B" Company, left Heilbronn on 23 April and arrived at Feldstetten, Germany, after spending the night at Walzheim, Germany.

On 25 April 1945, a detachment of men from "B" Company, with sufficient equipment for 300 feet of Class 40 bridge, left for Ulm, Germany where the construction of a reinforced raft was begun. It having been decided that a raft was impracticable, the rest of "B" Company plus equipment moved to Ulm and a bridge was constructed across the Danube. Meanwhile, Headquarters and Service Company and "A" Company moved to Laichingen, Germany.

On 27 April 1945, the remainder of the battalion moved to join "B" Company in Ulm, Germany. Upon arrival, "A" Company was given the mission of constructing a second bridge across the Danube. Both companies were charged with the maintenance of their bridges, the "B" Company bridge being dismantled on 16 May 1945 and the "A" Company bridge being dismantled 29 May 1945.

On 28 April 1945, both lettered companies departed for Goppingen, Germany to pick up Bailey bridge units for delivery to VI Corps. One unit was delivered 30 April 1945 at Vils, Austria and two other units were delivered 2 May 1945 at Oberammergau, Germany.

The period from 29 May 1945 until 15 June 1945 was spent in rest and relaxation with baseball and softball leagues playing daily schedules and organized recreational convoys visiting places of interest in Germany. During this period, the battalion engaged in some transportation missions, transporting bridge equipment from Ulm to Mannheim and from Antwerp to Mannheim.

On 16 June 1945 the unit was relieved of assignment to Seventh Army and left Ulm Germany for Camp Washington, D.C., France. The battalion traveled in convoy and bivouaced the first night at Kaisersautern after traveling 185 miles. The second day the convoy moved 150 miles, bivouacing at Montmedy, France. The unit arrived at Camp Washington, D.C. on 18 June 1945 after traveling 80 miles.

Processing of equipment and personnel for direct redeployment to the Pacific began after arrival at Camp Washington, D.C. This involved a motor trip to Marseille and return by half of the battalion personnel on a turn in of all heavy engineer equipment for depot stack.

On 10 August 1945 the battalion left Camp Washington, D.C. by train for

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the Marseille Port of Embarkation and arrived at the Calas Staging Area on 12 August, 1945.

Two days later Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces and preparation began for shipment to the United States. The unit boarded the SS General Squier on 3 September 1945 and sailed the next day for the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, Newport News, Va., arriving there on 14 September 1945.

Forty five days recuperative furloughs at home were given to all personnel at Camp Patrick Henry, Va. and men began departure for their respective reception stations throughout the U.S. on 15 September 1945.

After recuperative furloughs, personnel not already discharged from the service or retained at their reception stations reassembled at Camp Swift, Texas where the unit is scheduled for inactivation 15 November 1945.

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