

1946

549th engineer light ponton company

Audley F. Connor

United States Army

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Engineer Light
Ponton Company

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P. I. Dedication

This book is sincerely dedicated to those
"PONTONEERS" who have left us to soldier in the
Great Beyond.

ELMER, GEORGE, JINSE, ALVIN.



Preface

One of the war's famed Engineer Light Ponton Companies was born on paper in Washington, D. C. on 14 January 1943, a full five months before its first soldier opened the door of the orderly room at Camp Hood, Texas. Never then realizing what a great part he would play in World War II the 549th Engineer knocked the dirt from his spikes and got ready for the great race across the States and half way 'round the world. It was indeed to be history, and now the curtain opens on the big show—



The
**CURTAIN
RISES**

IT is a warm Easter Sunday evening in 1943. The setting is Killeen, Texas. The characters are 19 soldiers all standing on the platform of the railroad station in this little Texas town and they are all wondering what is going to happen next. Looking around they see a GI semi-trailer truck parked out front. The driver approaches and asks, "Say, man! You cats going to Camp Hood?" A distorted "yes" emerges from a solitary figure in this small group of soldiers. The driver tells them he was sent to pick them up. So they toss on their barrack bags and climb on the long trailer. After an hour's ride, the truck swung into the main gate at Camp Hood and rolled to a stop in front of the 374th Engineer Battalion Headquarters. The NCO in charge, Master Sergeant Ed Crosby, went in to report and the new 549th Engineer Light Ponton Company was assigned a company area next to the 374th Engineers.

The next day or so was spent drawing equipment. The men went over and were amazed to find several large 13-ton Brockway bridge-erector trucks instead of the usual Ponton semi-trailers which were standard trucks for a Light Ponton Company at that time. After much testing and making of suggestions the 549th's first convoy began to roll from Post Ordnance to the 549th Motor Pool. Along the route somewhere T/4 Hemphill, the cook, ran into quite a lot of difficulty and to this day he hasn't been able to live it down. Some of the boys go as far as to say that the truck was actually smoking when Hemphill climbed out from under the wheel. A few days later the boys ran into a similar problem when they had to figure out how to raise the hydraulic boom to load the Treadway Bridge equipment on and off the flat cars at the Post Engineer railhead.

The honor of being the first man to operate one of these booms goes to M/Sgt. Crosby, who figured it out and after mounting the platform he warned everybody to get out of the way. He calmly proceeded to raise the boom.

Now we introduce the members of the cadre. Master Sergeant Ed Crosby, who also helped activate the 41st Singing Engineers, was a member of the famous 24th Infantry Regiment and was well on his way to being a 30-year man when he joined the 549th. The first top-kick of the outfit was 1st Sgt. Merrial Moody, another Regular Army man. He too had been a member of the famed 24th Infantry and spent considerable time in the mounted troop section of that outfit which appeared in horse shows all over the country. The first motor sergeant of the unit was S/Sgt. Raymond Lamb, another Regular Army man and also a member of the 24th Infantry. He later became a Warrant Officer. Staff Sergeant Joseph M. Williams was the first supply sarge and Joe will tell you that the special Table of

Equipment, under which we were organized, gave the S-4 Section plenty of trouble. Staff Sergeant Matthew Hunter, mess sergeant, had the honor of feeding the hungry "Pontoneers." Staff Sergeants John A. Harrison and James E. Johnson were leaders of the 2nd and 3rd platoons. Technician 4th grade Theodore Hemphill, the first cook, was soon known as that "Red Cook" in the kitchen. The original gang will tell you he could really boss a chow line. Technician 4th grade Henry W. Williams was just a mechanic when he came to us but he moved right into Sgt. Lamb's job as motor sergeant when Lamb left us to accept a Warrant. Technician 4th grade Herman Fields was the company carpenter and sign painter as well. He did some pretty good work building up our first company area in Camp Hood. Sergeants Wilson R. Forney and Willie Bobo were section leaders and Sergeant Samuel "Tex" Oliver was the Communication Chief. He impressed the "recruits", as all of us were called when we first hit the 549th, by talking much "trash". Technician 5th grade Grady Canty was one of the cooks and soon became famous for his sweet rolls and parkerhouse rolls. T/5 Andrew Floyd was a mechanic and it wasn't long before the guys in the outfit learned that he was a very lucky gentleman when it came to games of chance. T/5 Manchester Lopez, supply clerk, was also known as a very lucky "cat" while Corporal William Oden, a squad leader, had the monicker of "Killer Oden" because he really knew how to use a pair of boxing gloves. He won several fights at Hood. Corporal Aubrey Evans was also a squad leader and everybody soon recognized him as the machine gun expert of the Pontoneers. Corporal Houston Johnson was the first company clerk and he won recognition as a "leather pusher" from way back. He had been a Golden Glover before coming into the army.

Having introduced the first enlisted men in the 549th, let's take a look at the officers. Second Lt. Charlie Hensley was the first officer in the outfit. He came from the 76th Light Ponton Company with the cadre and he had previous service as an enlisted man on the Alcan Highway. On the 1st of May Lieutenants Folkers and Hagar joined the unit from the 374th Engineers with Folkers taking command and Hagar becoming Executive Officer. May 6th marked the arrival of three more officers from the Engineer Officers Pool at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. They were: Second lieutenants Burch D. Wade, who took over the duties of Personnel Officer; Robert A. Flynn, the leader of the 2nd Platoon, James R. Hopkins who took over the 3rd Platoon and John Clayshulte the new Motor Officer.

One week and three days after the cadre arrived at Camp Hood, Private First Class David L. Poe walked into the orderly room of

the 549th and became the first man other than the cadre to join the outfit. May 30th 1943, 97 enlisted men arrived from the Engineer Replacement Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The 549th began to blossom like a flower in the field, well on its way to full bloom. Soon after the men from Leonard Wood arrived driver training was started and the "cats" began to swing those Brockways, 2½'s and M-6 weapons carriers down the roads around Hood. We also came to know first echelon maintenance backward and forward, besides running that dear old obstacle course or "bicycle" as some of the boys began to call it. We learned to "dry run" fire the 37mm gun and the 50 Cal. MG and brother that Texas sun was really hot while doing, "fall out one, fall out two" gun exercises. Incidentally, driving those trucks wasn't as easy as it sounds. We were cutting our driving teeth on the same driving courses as the tank drivers and TDs.

During these days many incidents occurred. Eddie Black came down with a case of mumps and everybody was quarantined to the company area for two weeks. Some of the fellows were pretty "salty on Black" but we made the best of it. We also remember "Big Red" Austin being the permanent Corporal of the Guard and the time he got that Pfc. stripe. About that time Sidney C. Arnold and Walter (Billy Bunk) Barlow were doing some fine soldiering and promoted to Pfc. and even Corporal. Corporals Leon Wilborn and Stanley J. Short can also be included in this group. On 16 July 1943, twenty more men joined us from the ERTC at Fort Leonard Wood, and on the 22nd of July the bunch from Camp Maxey joined up with us—"Old Man" Haynes, Oren Brew, "Short Man" Broadnax, Lyles, Bingham, and "Little Rabbit" Patterson. On August 5th, 17 enlisted men came to us from the 320th A Bn., and 21 from the 321st AA Bn. Eddie Freeman, "I know what the score is"—Jennings, Gab Brown, Augustus Brown—better known as "Head First"—James "Hop-a-long" Owens, M. C. "Slick" Douglas, "Southern Baby" Osborne and Daniel "Old Soldier" Houston were in that bunch. The following day we received 31 doughboys from the Infantry Replacement Center at Camp Wheeler, Georgia and were they glad as hell to see those trucks of ours! In this bunch we got "Gas Drunk" Shelman, "Curly" Small, Pollard Henderson, Robert Henry, Henry Franklin, "Little Joe" Williams, "Chattanooga Red" Townsend, William Sonia, Bobby Lary, "Little" Ferguson, Emile Turner, Henry Andrews, Rembert "Katy Mae" Belton, and Tommie "The Cook" Jones.

About this time we built our first Treadway bridge and "man" what a job! It took us exactly two days and nights to put it up and tear it down. Just about this time we became famous for our "mad" convoys to

Austin, Texas and soon everyone knew us as the "Rolling 49." One day we loaded and departed for Area 6 at Hood and started building Treadway Trestle bridges. On one of these such days, Murray was scared into a sweat, and some of the boys say he was shaking like a leaf for when the dust cleared away there was 6 feet of Treadway bridge resting on the ground instead of on the trestles.

In October there were many latrine rumors floating around that we were going to leave Camp Hood and move to Camp Swift, Texas. Late in October we started turning in the Treadway bridge, the Brockways and the M-6. Rumor turned into reality and we worked hard in preparing for the move.

At 1420 hours, 28 October 1943, the 549th arrived at Camp Swift, tired, dirty, and hungry as the devil. We had quite a time getting assigned to barracks and doing the usual "GI-ing" but by night we were all settled and wondering what was going to happen next. Then one day we started drawing the M-3 pneumatic bridge and everybody was soon convinced that there was quite a lot of hard work connected with this bridge, a little too much for most of us. Next we started driving those ponton semi-trailers and Brother, backing those 40-foot trailers up and swinging them around corners was no sop.

As soon as all of our equipment was drawn we started taking ITP and MTPs and that called for some pretty rough hikes and bivouacs on the mighty Colorado River. We built rafts, bridges, and made assault boat crossings until we were almost blue in the face. Many pieces of balk and chess fell or were dropped where they should not. Around this time the boys had just about taken over Austin, Texas, Sam Houston and Tillison College. Brew, Bracey and Scotty will agree on the above statement.

We ate our first Thanksgiving dinner at Camp Swift after playing a rousing good football game. It was part of those "platoon problems" Capt. Folkers prescribed for the day. The day following Thanksgiving we went over the infiltration course and everybody felt sure that we were ready for combat. It rained, everybody got soaked and raincoats had to be salvaged. Willie "Chief" Robinson had quite a time out there that night and Gasaway, the "Field Marshal", got his "Kicks" when he took over one of the guns. Right after that we went out on the range for a week, firing Carbines and some of the boys won "beaucoup" cigarettes and marksmanship medals.

The company then experienced its first great turn-over of men. We lost quite a bunch to the 489th Water Supply Bn. "Red" Brunson, Bellis Andrews, Eddie Greer, Ruben Smith and quite a few others were included. In return for these men we welcomed "Wash" Washington,

"K.P." Priestly, Ozell "Duckbill" Graham, Coy Ford, Bill Holmes, Wm. "Curley" Mason, "Mac" McAlpin, "Big Man" Burgess, L. C. Venson, John "Mule" Clifton and Virgil Hightower.

Right after Christmas, the 549th gave its first dance at Service Club No. 3 at Camp Swift. We got together and created a "slush fund", bought refreshments and decorated the club in the red and white colors of the Engineers. Special guests included the "Reet Fine" coeds from Sam Houston and Tillison Colleges in Austin. The music was "groovey" and S/Sgt. Mathew Hunter whipped up some very tasty refreshments and a fine time was had by all, although Shelman and A. L. Smith were continuously asking about the "Lush". Our own MP force turned in a good job that night under the direction of "Ricko" Bracey. We might add that the three Engineer Regiments on the Post were rather "salty" about not being able to come to the dance but after all it was our affair—period.

After the dance we settled back down to the job of passing our MTP and ITP tests and came through with flying colors. About this time "Big-Red" Austin started being the company Medic and the latrine rumors were saying that we were going to leave the Lone Star State and head for the 4th Army maneuvers in Louisiana.

In the meantime the 549th lost two mighty fine officers, 1st Lt. Bradley Hagar, who went back to the Engineers' School at Ft. Belvoir, Va., and Lt. John K. Clayshulte who departed for overseas duty. The latter was succeeded by 2nd Lt. George A. Grier from the 260th Engineer Combat Bn. The minute he landed he was sent to the Belvoir Bailey bridge school and from here on was in the expert class when bumping into any Bailey bridge problem.

It was quite a wonderful feeling to have those ITP tests behind our backs, but almost none realized how quick those maneuvers were creeping upon us. Nevertheless we crammed in just as many rides as we could to Austin and "Bivouac Area." The big semi-s were put in shape and the floats packed and the balk and chess stacked on the trailers. All that was necessary was the word "GO", which came on the morning of 9 February 1944, precisely at 0500. We slipped out gate three at Camp Swift without anyone in Camp knowing we were on our way, except the cooks on early shifts that morning at the various camp mess halls. Lt. Wade took off with "Mac" MacMillian the previous day to scout the Louisiana bivouac before we arrived. We pushed across Texas all day passing some of the towns in which some of the fellas lived or had relatives living—Giddings, Navasota, and finally arrived at Livingston for our first night on the ground. There were some of the boys who ran out of gas, but by dawn they caught up and we pushed off again. Along about three in the

afternoon of the second day, we landed right smack in the Louisiana swamps but fortunately we located on top of a pretty good-sized knoll which came to be known as HADDEN FERRY. At least we were pretty much out of the mud for a while. Even at that S/Sgt. James Johnson stuck most of his platoon trucks out on one side of the bivouac area.

Well, we were finally here. So this was Louisiana!! A few of the boys knew the country—Willie Robinson, Cpl. Orren Brew, Cpl. Charles Jolivet, Alonzo Scott, Henry Franklin, Herman Fields, "Brother-in-law" Washington, Nick Nickelson, Mac MacAlpin, "Streed Sneed, "Wise Up" Sonia, Frank Johnson, Robert "Buck" Hamilton, and even Lt. Charlie Hensley claimed to know the country, being from Port Arthur, just down the river on the Texas side. As much as they knew about "Louisiana", as we called it, we taught them more about the mud and the Sabine River than they would have learned in a whole lifetime.

For the first two phases we did nothing in the way of battling the REDS or BLUES, nor did we have to put on those heavy helmets. We made up for it in the end for we got a good taste of what the M-3 Bridge was like. Instead of building it by daylight, we seemed to slip and slide around those muddy banks in the dark, knocking each others heads with balk and chess. That was "strategy", so the officers said. It was strategy to keep awake those nights. We built the bridge about four times for "practice" then finally the brass started to appear and even Captain Folkers started riding around until Calvin Cage upset him in the C and R car one day. Our first job was almost futile for we left the river and landed in a swamp up near a town called "Slagle". We bogged down for a solid week before we winched those Macks and Auto cars out. Then we took off the BURR FERRY and dug some more foxholes. Here we got our first real action. Lieutenants Flynn and Grier took the two platoons back to Hadden Ferry to build bridge. A Major gave the word to retreat—we retreated and ran smack into the enemy, "Reds". Half of the 2nd platoon were captured and were in captivity for two days before they were released, with the half dozen Macks. Lt. Hopkins and S/Sgt. Harrison had the rest of the third platoon, which operated in this phase six rafts for the 44th Division. Our first casualty was Lt. Hensley who was run down by one of the six tons one night on a convoy mission.

In the 5th phase, we came across from Texas and operated with the 92nd Division near Evans, Louisiana. It was one of the hardest jobs we ever had getting to the bridge site. Once the bridge was up and ready to be reloaded, it rained and was next to impossible to get the semi-trailers to the bridge site. We cut loose the bridge—395 feet long—in sections

and there is many a story to be told by the operators of those rafts for the 27-mile ride down the Sabine to Merryville. The last phase found the 549th in nearly the same predicament, for we built from the opposite side of the river in support of the 44th Division. It rained just as the traffic crossed the bridge and it was "hell" getting those 10-ton loads out of these one-lane trails. If it hadn't been for drivers like Murray, Woods, Steveson, Washington (Russ), and a D-7, we may have been still fighting the battle of maneuvers.

Most of the last two weeks in Louisiana was spent loading up freight cars. It was a new worthy experience and a great one for it took 69 cars for the mighty "PONTONEERS" to roll to Ft. Benning, Ga. which was our Post Maneuver Station. We departed from Camp Polk, Louisiana on the 4th of April 1944, a wiser and happier bunch. We were going to get a chance to see town again after two months in the woods.

We arrived at Ft. Benning, Georgia one night about midnight—the 5th of April to be exact. As usual a good many of the boys passed through their hometowns on the way across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Charlie Summers saw Shreveport, Shanks, MacArthur, and Belton watched Vicksburg from the mess car. Along about the time the train rolled into the Birmingham railway, Sgt. Aubrey Evans, Ed McCormick and Jince Jackson were ready to take a pass. A band was at the Benning railhead to greet the weary Engineer Company and it didn't take the Folker's Brigade long to find a good old GI Army barrack that night. Lt. Hensley and advance crew forgot to make the beds but we at least had cots.

It was learned the next day, in the latrine manner, that we would be a "spit and polish outfit" and were sent just to teach the infantry's shavetail aspirants how a good engineer goes about building a bridge. This outfit was in fine fettle to do the job and we were raring to toss the first one across to the state of Alabama from the Georgia side. It took about two weeks to clean up after the other gang left. Besides that mess the mighty Chattahoochee River ran wild and tore down the infantry school's preparations for the "River Crossing Problem". New abutments needed to be built, roads and new approaches had to be remodeled, and we had a motor pool to get into shape before we took on too much show work. It all added up to work, and made us even more "chesty".

The Engineer Section of the Infantry School at Benning called us to put on our first problem two weeks after we arrived. It seemed that we weren't the only new outfit to take on the demonstration work because every time we took a break, Major Evans, who was in charge of the problem would call for another rehearsal. Between rehearsals we would con-

tinue to build approaches and repair beats. There were exactly five rehearsals before we were allowed to get in front of the OCS candidates and show our stuff. This is about how we lined up for the first problem in April. Lt. Hopkins and the 3rd platoon had the main section of the bridge building. Lt. Grier and the 1st platoon had the raft to build plus feeding the 3rd platoon the assault boats for the bridge. Lt. Flynn and most of the 2nd platoon set off dynamite charges "simulating" cannon, bombs, and demolitions. Others were split up between various groups. The cooks and motor pool boys did the driving for S/Sgt. Bryant's crew that slid the boats off the trucks and down the bank into the water. They also got the tread-way down to Lt. Hopkins, S/Sgts. Harrison and Johnson. It took real driving and before the end many of the boys were better drivers than they were mechanics and cooks.

Lt. Wade and Sgt. Hurt carried radios for Captain Folkers, who usually started the fireworks for our show with the words "Mamma Bear Meets Papa Bear". Cpl. Wilburn, Cpl. Pee and Pfc. Conner had the job of pulling anyone out of the water with the fleet of safety boats they operated. In addition, they operated the rafts once. The mighty first platoon got them together. That is about how we operated that first day in front of our audience. There were many changes and additions made later but about all we can accredit ourselves for that first time was a bridge thrown across in 65 minutes, a raft in 18 minutes, and a total of a half dozen charges which went off at the right time. The boys in the bleachers liked the show but we felt sure we'd give them a better one on the second try.

The second try at the River Crossing Problem was quite an improvement. Added to this problem was Sgt. Evans and his expedient raft which took over the jeep and 37 mm. howitzer. Cpl. Brew and Sgt. Forney got together and most of the dynamite charges went off while S/Sgt. Bryant and Sgt. Daxidson slung the raft together making possible the crossing in good order of the $\frac{3}{4}$ ton and 105 mm. howitzer. The safety boats, two assault boats pinned together and propelled by a 22 H.P. motor were manned by Corporals David Pee and Walter Goodlee, Eddie Freeman, Bobby Lary, Alonzo Scott and Virgil Hightower. To top the show, the assault bridge went up in 45 minutes and we got the week-end off. Even the Infantry put on a good assault crossing and mopping up demonstration on the second trial.

Too, the 2nd platoon had another assignment which meant quite a lot of work at Benning. To them it was known as "235". For the OCS students it was the "Attack of a Fortified Position". It was the Engineers' job to build the pillboxes blown up by artillery fire and also to install a grandstand seating 1,000

men for the big audiences. All in all it was the fighting 2nd platoon that carried on most of the work. Also during the problem Sgt. Forney's crew installed an expedient bridge "under fire".

The 1st and 3rd platoons had another little problem that involved a bit of night work. "Communications problems number so and so. Well, who does remember the number? I doubt whether the Infantry School does now. In short it involved putting a foot bridge across a creek for the "wire chiefs" to cross after paddling the first "Wave" over to the far shore. About 2 A.M. in the morning we PONTONEERS installed a quick assault beat bridge for the communication vehicles to move into position on the far side. The action was all done under the cover of darkness and in perfect silence.

Nor was Benning all work. It is well to remember that there's no other post in the States quite as well "set up" as this one. There was a ball game every night and the latest movie — if you got in line soon enough. The "big" pastime was a couple of blocks to the north of the company area, where the Post WAC Detachment Section II was located. Hightower, Scotty, Fann, Crowder, John D. Anderson, Samples "Chow Hound", Billy Bunk and "Big Will" plus "Rico" were really on the ball over there. The paratroops landed at Benning and proceeded to take over. A regular Sunday morning feature was to hook a trailer load of assault boats to a 2½ ton truck, load on some of our speedy 22 H.P. Johnson outboard motors and pull over to the WAC Detachment, pick up the girls and head for the Chattohochee River. Upon arriving at the Engineer Landing, the scene of our great triumphs, the 549th's fleet would be launched and sail merrily down the river. These excursions were many and a good time was had by all.

When our 1st anniversary rolled around we were at Benning. Capt. Folkers and Lt. Grier decided that we should celebrate it in a big way, so plans were made for our "Paper Anniversary" fete. On the morning of 6 March 1944 details were sent to the large Rec Hall near the theater to clean and decorate the place and the rest of us went to the motor pool for some very light "First Echelon Maintenance". It was very light because everybody was thinking about our big dance that night. Athletics was featured in the afternoon as each platoon played every other platoon a rousing game of softball. The "Fighting 2nd Platoon" was crowned company champs. When that was over, we ate chow and everybody started getting "sharp" for the big dance. Two trailer buses were sent to Columbus, Georgia to bring out the U.S.O. Hostesses. The Reception Center Swing Band was hired to swing out with some "solid swing". Upon arriving at the Rec Hall we found that the decorating detail, under

the direction of Lt. Grier and Sgt. Johnson, "went to town". Rubber pontoons and assault boats were lined around the sides of the dance floor along with large anchors, paddles and life buoys. Our Engineer colors, scarlet and white, were all over the place. At one end of the dance floor was a long table loaded down with food and drinks. This table was occupied by our honored guests, consisting of the following: Capt. and Mrs. Folkers, Lt. and Mrs. Flynn plus Lt. Wade and Lt. Grier each with a local Southern belle.

Sgt. Bryant presided as master of ceremonies and introduced the dance committee and officers. When the band played a special number for the officers, the guys learned how well our officers could cut a rug, especially Capt. Folkers. Lt. Wade gave a digest of the Company history up to that point, not knowing that succeeding chapters would be gloriously written later by the famed Pontoneers. S/Sgt. Hunter and his kitchen crew really put their "best" when it came to the refreshments—and that punch! Oh! Boy! It really was a pleasant evening.

It is time to recognize one of our most gifted talent living in our midst. These lads we called the "PONTONEERS". They had an auspicious beginning in Camp Swift and gave out with a spiritual light which every chaplain in the Louisiana maneuver area sought. "Mitch" Vernon Mitchell, leader boy, had decided to call his gang the "HARMONIZERS" and Sgt. James Davidson was to be the roving-in-between-gospel-arranger. The other members of the rapidly-to-become-famous group was Cpl. Leon Wilburn, (the "Bill Kenny" tenor only better), Technician 5th grade Ernest Patterson, "deeper than deep" bass; and Pfc. Adam Davis the baritone. Somewhere in the maneuvers they crept a little too close to Lt. Grier's tent with their song-making and they were given a job "to sing him to sleep each night". This was considered a part of their training for "Special Service work on the road". During the maneuvers they sang before several large crowds in the Leesville, Louisiana auditorium and on another occasion spent the evening being the "hit of the show" for 18th Corps Headquarters. Once in Benning the radio angle came into light. Themes were changed, as were names. Being Engineers and so closely aligned to ponton work they chose the very tricky and snappy name "PONTONEERS" which eventually was to be the slogan adopted by the company. It wasn't too long before Lt. Grier and the boys were frequently the airplanes around Georgia on a weekly program and dishing out bits of in-between stuff for the "Ft. Benning On The Air" program. "Mitch" and his gang soon began to see the necessity of veering from the routine spiritual singing and it was at Benning that they began picking up hits of "Ragtime". As

the story progresses other "PONTONEER" accomplishments will be noted.

During the summer months the men had plenty of opportunity for individual recognition. Almost any week-end found part of our skilled motor-boat crew on the tricky Chattahoochee River doing recovery work for the City of Columbus, Georgia. On one occasion, Pfc. Audley F. Conner, Jr., Cpl. David Pee, T/5 Jesse Rice, and James Samples were individually cited by the city and by the Commanding General of the Infantry school for efficient work in the recovery of one of the city's prominent personages.

There are many other things by which we can remember Ft. Benning. Foremost, the PARATROOP SCHOOL was there, and we were practically living right in the listening to the wild tales of the troopers and their "ruff" training. Each day the skies around were filled with white chutes lazily floating down on the "Bama Side" of the river. Of course we roughed it up a bit, too. We fired our first grenades and bazookas at Benning. There were many other tricky ranges we had to try. Capt. Folkers, Lt. Flynn, Lt. Wade, and Lt. Grier were regular customers on the Benning golf course and many times Mrs. Flynn was reported waiting at the 18th hole with the rolling pin.

We added several new members at Benning. The rookies received their basic training under Lt. Hopkins, M/Sgt. Ed Crosby and Cpl. Walter Barlow. One group of these came from Ft. Sam Houston and included George St. Martin, Louis Hoodby, Ardell Clark, Ben Bryant, George Wallace, Hence Fowler, Alfred Jacobs, John R. Brown, Whitney Rogers, Henry Chancler, Vatchell Denson, Ernest Jeamard, Wallace Clark, Ollie L. Jackson, Isaiah Turner, Robert C. Roy, John Savannah, Larkin Stanley. The 1697 Engineers sent us Elijah White, Sims, Lorenzo Gresham, Thomas Price, James L. Miles, Jines Jackson, Jesse Heard, Lathus Hall, Eugene Jones, John Clyburn, Leroy Davis, Louis A. Ferguson, Harvest Hall, Perley Richardson, Vernon Saunders, Curtis Smith, Purcell Strowbridge. It didn't take the boys long to get in the groove and they became an integral part of the 549th from the start. Also at Benning we lost Lt. Charlie Hensley to the 242nd Engr. Combat Battalion and received Lt. Don "Utah Kid" Staker as the new motor officer.

Well, we put up bridges and took them down as many times and we were actually getting good. During the latter part of July we were informed that this was to be our last problem before moving up the line. We aimed to show these OCS boys who could slam together a bridge in little or no time. All went well in that last problem. The Infantry laid their smoke screens "down winds" and crossed in their assault boats, a company strong

and in perfect wave formation. The "Artillery" (Forney and Crew) let 'em have it and S/Sgt. Weldon Bryant's "Fighting First" started the ball rolling by throwing a five-boat raft, loaded, out into mid-stream in four minutes. Sgt. Aubrey Evans had his jeep-on-assault-boat-raft completed in about the same time. M/Sgt. Ed Crosby in his second trial on the flying ferry, footbridge went up in eight minutes, and "Poppa Bear" said to "Mamma Bear" that the bridge was going up. Well, it did — everything went smooth, simply not a ripple in the operating efficiency of the many sections working on the job. Still there were no bombers or strafing planes to interfere with construction progress. Usually they appeared before the bridge was halfway completed. This time we had only four more boats to fit into the bridge before traffic would start. Still no radio warning. Two boats to go, then T/5 Hurt blared forth with his "ENEMY PLANES APPROACHING FROM THE NORTH! ENEMY PLANES APPROACHING FROM THE NORTH!" For five minutes it went on—bombing and confusion, then the all clear signal and the adding of the last two boats and treadway. Traffic started over this 300-foot structure exactly 27 minutes after the signal had been given to begin construction. But for interference by the planes, no doubt a record never to be broken would have been established. However this was an achievement to the glory of the 549th Engineers. Our accomplishments will be told in the tales of many grandfathers and Ft. Benning's mighty Engineers will live all over again.

After our last problem at Benning we again loaded up for the trip to Camp Gordon just across the State of Georgia near Augusta. We were to make this run by convoy, however; there were many things we sent by rail but being experts at the packing game, this caused no interference or need of mention. We departed the camp at 0500 hours on the 29th of June 1944 passing through Columbus. There was the usual bit of trouble that accompanies every convoy and as the day melted away so did miles. It didn't take long to get set up in Gordon. The buildings were good, buses ran close by and then to Augusta. Our real purpose was to process for overseas shipment — that is finish training and put on the last touches.

The first bit of fire came shortly after we landed. An officer and four enlisted men left for Ft. Fisher, North Carolina to attend a 50 calibre anti-aircraft school. These men later became the instructors of two officers and 32 enlisted men reporting to the same location the following week. The first crack-shots picked were Lt. George Grier, Sgt. Aubrey Evans, Cpls. Stanley Short, Leon Wilburn and Walter Barlow. From all reports these men mixed Ack-Ack with pleasure and had a surprisingly interesting course ready for the "recruits" who

followed the second week. Attendance was made up of all the truck drivers and a few assistant drivers; Chancler, Denson, Butler, Brew, Brodnax, Perly, Richardson, Samuel, Simpkins, James Boone, Johnnie Woods, Eldrew Jones, McAlpin, George Murray, Marcus Turner, Robert A. Culver, George A. Brown, Daniel Houston, Willis Washington, William Ferguson, Robert Robinson, Rembert Belton. Everybody became crack-shots on those truck-mounted 50 cal. machine guns and they received a group mark of 90% out of a possible 100%. So you see it wasn't all play and swimming in the Atlantic Ocean.

Our stay at Camp Gordon was very limited and latrine rumors were flying around in late August, to the effect we were going to move to Ft. Jackson. Just before we left Camp Gordon, we experienced a change in commanding officers. Capt. Folkers was transferred to the 1163rd Engineers Combat Group and 1st Lt. George B. Lotridge assumed command. Lt. Lotridge hailed from Texas and came to us from the 1698th Engineers Combat Battalion, where he was appropriately called "Bulldog" and he held that name the entire time he was with the "Pontoneers."

At 0700 hours on the morning of September 4, 1944 the Pontoneers' mighty feet rolled out of the motor pool at Camp Gordon, bound for Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. Little did we know that this was to be the last long convoy we would make in the Zone Of Interior.

We arrived at Ft. Jackson, S. C. at 1300 hours the same day we left Camp Gordon. The convoy was uneventful, although we drove much faster than everybody thought we would. The "Pontoneers" were rather disappointed in our new motor pool — a cleared space in the woods, no wash rack or anything. Then we marched to the company area, which was quite some distance. Somebody made the remark, "Dam we should run a convoy from the company area to the motor pool."

There was the usual scramble for beds and barracks plus GI-ing and drawing linen. We were restricted that first night at Ft. Jackson, for what we will never find out, but everyone had his own opinion as to why we were restricted.

After we were settled, we started a very rough training schedule as prescribed by 2nd Army in the POM (Processing for Overseas Movement) requirements. At Ft. Jackson it was mostly all work and no play. The clerks in the S-1, S-3 and S-4 sections will vouch for that. However it wasn't long until the "Pontoneers" had just about taken over the Capitol city of Columbia, S. C. It was here the "Pontoneers" discovered, that besides building bridges and driving trucks, some of the "Pontoneers" could do all right on the gridiron. Soon there was a football team, known as the Ft. Jackson Engineers and composed of players from the 549th

and our sidekick outfit the 1700th Engineer Combat Battalion. Not bragging or anything like that, but the "Pontoneers" were the mainstay of the team, with such "Pontoneers" as: "Big Red" Austin at right half, "Rico" Bracey, a brilliant triple threat man at quarter back, "Big Stan" Short at tackle along with the two Mississippi Mudcats, Barker and Shanks. Scotty also saw considerable service as end, along with "Big Will Wilburn. Austin and Bracey soon came to be known as the touch-down twins, and the pass combination between "Rico" and "Big Will" was feared by all of the Engineer opponents. They were defeated but once and the "Pontoneers" were out of the lineup.

September slipped into October and our work was increasing by leaps and bounds. We sent Lt. Grier, Sgt. Evans, "Rico", "Nick", "Boyd", Fields and Jolivet back to Camp Gordon to packing and crating the unit. We started packing and crating our equipment and what a job!! We worked in shifts, and the process continued 24 hours a day.

About this time we decided to sponsor a farewell dance. A committee was appointed and Allens' Gym was secured along with a good band. Refreshments and drinks were served. Although we had to stand two shake-down inspections and the "Pontoneers" convoy didn't arrive at the dance until nearly eleven o'clock, everybody moved in with that old "Pontoneers" spirit and a good time was had by all, including "Big Will" and "Baldy" Guess. Franklin and Conner seemed to have everything under control. Scotty ran into some rough road but got back on the smooth one. (P.D.Q.) Even Orren Brew had himself a ball that night.

After the dance, it was more hard work for the 549th and the last train was loaded and on the way to the Port of Embarkation. Then we started having showdown after showdown and "man" it really got the "Pontoneers" down. Not to mention that "mad" 2nd Army Air-Ground test, a really rough day.

Meanwhile the "Pontoneers" slightly took over the town of Columbia. The Harding street U.S.O. and the "Sweet Shop" were our headquarters. Johnny Jarrott, Baldy Guess, Paddler and Pedro had a controlling interest before we left the place. "Louie, The Admiral" was doing okay along with wire chief Franklin, Connor and Ostell Martin. As a matter of fact the 549th just about owned one complete block of stores, movies, etc. The mighty Brew had straight connections at the hospital.

The time for our departure was drawing near. We started having physicals and dental surveys, shots and a gang of P.O.M. requirements. Our P.O.M. inspections by the 2nd Army was satisfactory and we were just waiting around for our movement orders. About a week before we left Ft. Jackson we exchanged some men, saying goodbye to

"Gable" Johnson, "Big" Cobbs, Frank Harrison, Eugene "The Kid" Jones, "Curly" Mason, William Holmes and in return we got Leon "Rattler" Jones, Willie Crockett, and Henry Austin.

One Saturday night, out of the clear blue skies, our movement orders were received. Every "Pontoneer" will remember everything was confusing. Everybody was restricted, the S-1 section worked until almost dawn, all of the NCOs had to pull guard and it was cold as blue blazes.

That morning (Sunday) everybody was up at the crack of dawn, our packs were all rolled and the barracks were GI'd and we drew our Carbines from the supply room. The train was on the siding waiting and we barely got the last man aboard before the train started rolling. The trip to New York was uneventful; many of the Pontoneers passed their homes. Butler almost left us when we stopped at Broad Street Station in "Philly."

We arrived at Camp Shanks, New York on Monday afternoon 19 November at 1215 hours. Long remembered will be that long hike we took from the train to our area and also the first meal we ate at Camp Shanks, those fine hot dogs and chocolate milk at the PX. That night the S-1 Section worked until dawn get-

ting the shipping rosters out.

The next day the company started processing. Everybody was eager to get it over with so they could get a chance to see the sights of New York. We finished processing Thanksgiving and did we have a Thanksgiving Dinner? Even the "Pontoneers" famous chow hounds, Stringer, Butler, Joe Brown and Moon Parker, lest we forget "Big Will", said they had enough. Everyone had a very nice time in New York, seeing all of the sights and the places they had read about. All of the "Pontoneers" who lived close by got a chance to get a last look at home before we sailed.

On the 29th of November 1944, the 549th departed Camp Shanks by rail for the boat that was waiting in New York harbor. We rode the train to Hoboken and took a ferry across. We got off the ferry and marched or rather staggered, (because those packs we had on and our duffle bags were making everyone stagger) into a large enclosed pier to the music by a WAC band. "Beaucoup" Red Cross girls served doughnuts, hot coffee and candy bars. The "Pontoneers" ate and drank heavily, some later regretted it. Then we lined up in passenger list order and began to board His Majesty's Transport, The Louis Pasteur.

ACT 2... England



EMBARKING FOR EUROPE

MY TRAVELS IN EUROPE

By Sgt. Guess

ON a dark, dreary morning 29 November 1944, we departed Camp Shanks, New York and headed for the troop transport that was to take us to Europe and the war. At the time we arrived and boarded His Majesty Troop Transport, the converted Pasteur, we didn't know where we were going and cared less. This is the time in a soldier's life that he ceases to care about himself or what is to become of him. Those who have an insight in one's character and attitude know that one can acquire such mannerism.

To go on with my story—we boarded the Pasteur and laid in harbor that night. Early the next morning, 30 Nov. 1944, at approximately 0500 hours, we embarked for Europe. Our first day out at sea shall never be forgotten. During our brief, but exciting life, we have endured many illnesses of various types, but this first day at sea was the most unpleasant one we can remember. During the entire day, we were unable to eat, but yet, we continued to vomit. To this day we can't understand why many of us didn't die.

Our second day at sea wasn't as bad as the first and so on until we docked. Around the third day many of us were still unable to eat. Our food was prepared by English cooks and they don't cook as well as our cooks do, or may we add that their method of preparing food is quite different from ours.

It was on this day when we learned about two things. First, we were travelling unescorted. Secondly, our destination was Liver-

pool, England. During our trip to Europe and the War, the only thing that took place on the boat was gambling, cards, dice and swing music.

Never before had there taken place mass participation in gambling as on that boat. Of the some three thousand men on the boat, better than two-thirds took the chance on winning.

The trip did offer some amusement such as the movies, which took place about every night and afternoon, boxing, eating from the ship's canteen and a stage show. On the eighth day we pulled into harbor and on the ninth day we debarked at Liverpool. Our first glance at England was just as many of us had expected, from what we had read, studied or had been told by others who had preceded us to the country. After getting off the boat, we boarded buses, which took us to our billets, located about three miles from Liverpool at a place called Huyton, England. We arrived at 1000 hours and reported to headquarters where we were to work.

At 1130 hours all of the buses had been cleared and we had formed columns of two's with full field equipment. Everybody was craning their necks trying to see what kind of place at which we were to be stationed, while we marched through the gate of site # 3V, at Camp Peak. We were assigned to brick huts and began to set up housekeeping in Merrie Old England. After we drew blankets, we ate our first real meal in nine days. We then assembled in the mess hall and was briefed by

a Lt. Colonel. He told us what we could expect, where we could go and what England was like.

Well we sweated out three days and nights in Camp Peak waiting for passes and our money to be changed, and at the same time listening with open ears to the tales of the boys who had been smart enough to change their money with the British sailors while aboard the ship. They had been out, had their first contact with England, its people, customs and beer.

Here, we shall mention an outfit that shared one of our compartments on the boat coming over. They worked with us that last night aboard ship and when we pulled into Huyton, they were just across the company street. This outfit was a Signal Corps unit, the 537th Signal Heavy Construction Co., and from what we learned during the short time we were with them, they could construct "Many" miles of line in record time. The Pontoneers came to know guys like "Muse" Donale "Ask Me Another" Adams, "Slim" Summerville, and many others.

Shortly after we arrived in Huyton, the 537th began printing a company paper, which they called "Pole Line Jive". It was then that Lt. Grier thought up the idea of the 549th having a company paper. So on the 3rd of February the company newspaper "Ponton Patter" was born. It was a four-paged, mimeographed sheet, containing an editorial, gossip columns and miscellaneous articles for each platoon. The gossip column "got down with it" and caught most of the fellows off guard. There were a lot of red faces after that first issue, including some in the officers' quarters. Our paper increased in popularity with each issue. Even the English girl friends of the Pontoneers were clamoring for issues and we even made the radio on the Armed Forces Network. Jack Carson of the GI Journal, mentioned "Ponton Patter" as being a new ETO organizational paper and congratulated the editor, Pfc. Conner and Lt. Grier, on having a fine paper.

When we landed in England, everybody started hounding "Kid" Curry, the mail clerk, for mail. Day after day passed and no mail, everyone was wondering if the "Jerries" weren't sinking all of the boats with our mail; it seemed as though everyone was sending but no one receiving. Then on Christmas Eve "Kid" Curry returned from the APO with a large sack of mail and that was the best and the most welcomed Christmas gift for any of us in England. Some of the folks back home should have been there to watch the large smiles appear on the fellows' faces, when they received their first letter overseas on that cold bleak Christmas Eve in England.

Just following Christmas, the company was ordered to Bailey Bridge School at Holton, England, up near the Scottish border. When we

landed at Holton, we saw a British Army Camp that had once been a linoleum factory. There was mud galore, outside latrines, and it was bitter cold. The large factory building, designated as our sleeping quarters, was very large with double-deck bunks and concrete floors. The centralized heating for the building consisted of one solitary pipe about 2½ inches in diameter running through the ceiling. We were at Holton for eight days, and during that time we built floating Bailey Bridges and all types of land Baileys.

Much source of entertainment, every noon hour at Holton, came in the form of the "daily Ponton races". Usually it was platoon against platoon—the 2nd platoon won constantly, but the real drubbing took place one day when 1st Sgt. Johnson, M/Sgt. Harrison and Capt. Lotridge came in last on Headquarters' ponton. The penalty resulted in a "strapping race" down one of the English hillsides, with the entire company slapping the losers' "backsides" with their belts. Headquarters never again issued another challenge.

The next to the last day of schooling, we went to build a 380-foot D.S. floating Bailey Bridge, in an attempt to crack the standing three-year record, which had been set by a Royal Canadian Engineer Company. Their record was 400 feet of double single bridge, constructed in two hours and twenty minutes. That morning we were to make history. There was frost, darkness, and it must have been far below freezing. First, we were given our assignments. The second platoon was given the near shore approach and the first six bays of the bridge. The first platoon drew the far shore spans.

By 1030 hours all of the pontoons had been secured and each platoon had chosen its construction site. We built fires and waited for chow. We finished chow at 1230 and at 1300 hours the order, "Construct the Bridge" was given. All platoons fell to their tasks and worked at record-breaking speed. In less than fifty minutes the near shore approach had been constructed and two of the bays were already on pontoons and being towed into place. The 3rd platoon has just about completed the middle span and only seventy minutes had elapsed. The 1st platoon turned in a mighty speedy job of construction on the far shore span. In about one hour and forty-five minutes after we started, the 3rd platoon was rowing the middle spans into place. Shortly after the 3rd platoon had hooked its bays onto the near-shore spans, the 1st platoon began moving the far shore spans into position. The 2nd platoon jacked the approach down level and there it was. Across the Weir river in Merrie Old England was 380 feet of double single Bailey bridge, constructed by 170 men of the 549th Engineer Light Ponton Company in two hours and three minutes.

Everybody felt pretty good that evening. In Lancaster, the nearest large town, that night scotch flowed like wine for the "Pontoneers". The following day we rode buses to Lancaster and boarded trains for Huyton. A happy bunch because we knew that even though our huts would not make you break out in a sweat from becoming overheated, it would be much better than Huyton, and warmer too.

When we returned to Huyton, we found that the Pontoneers' English girl friends had missed them very much and the boys wasted no time making up for lost time and started drawing their overdue sugar rations.

We also started taking a little more training, which included classes in the mess hall and some light hikes to Prescott. In England the term "Paratrooper" began to be known as a guy who had messed up and had to carry a full field pack all day. "Southern Baby" Osborne and "Sweet Papa" Sims were paratroopers of old standing before we left England. Virgil "Eisenhower" Hightower made corporal about this time and was beginning to be known as Cpl. "Ike."

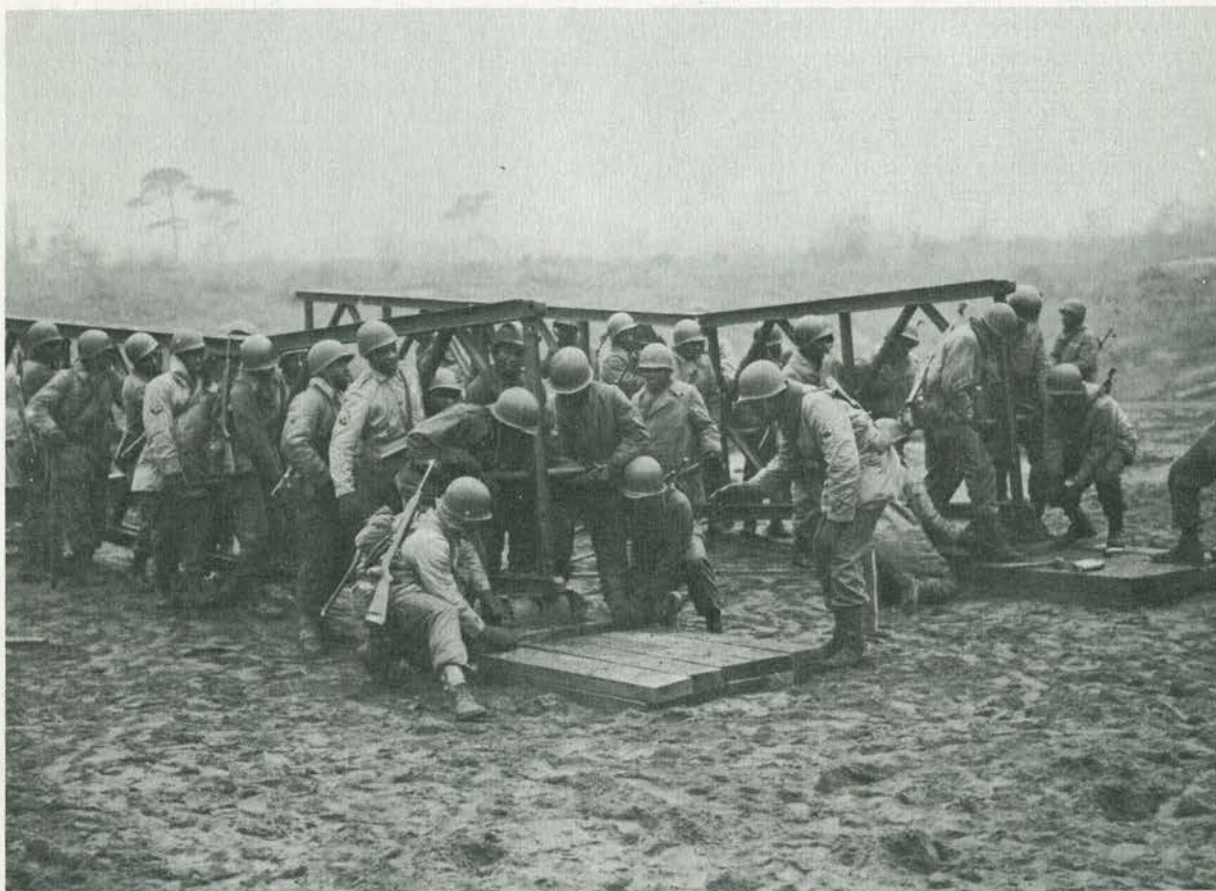
In February we tackled the large job of assembling our equipment and making it ready for combat. Hurt made Tech. fourth and began conducting schools for his telephone

operators, linesmen, and radio operators. Lazine rumors were flying fast and thick as to when we would leave England for the Normandy beaches.

Lest we forget, our personnel Sgt. Major, Sgt. Guess "had it made" as the saying goes as did Fann and Floyd "Pedro" Francis and Billy Bunk had us all beat, to say nothing of "Wash", Short, "Louie" and Chattanooga Red and "Little" Ferguson had quite a battle over Jean.

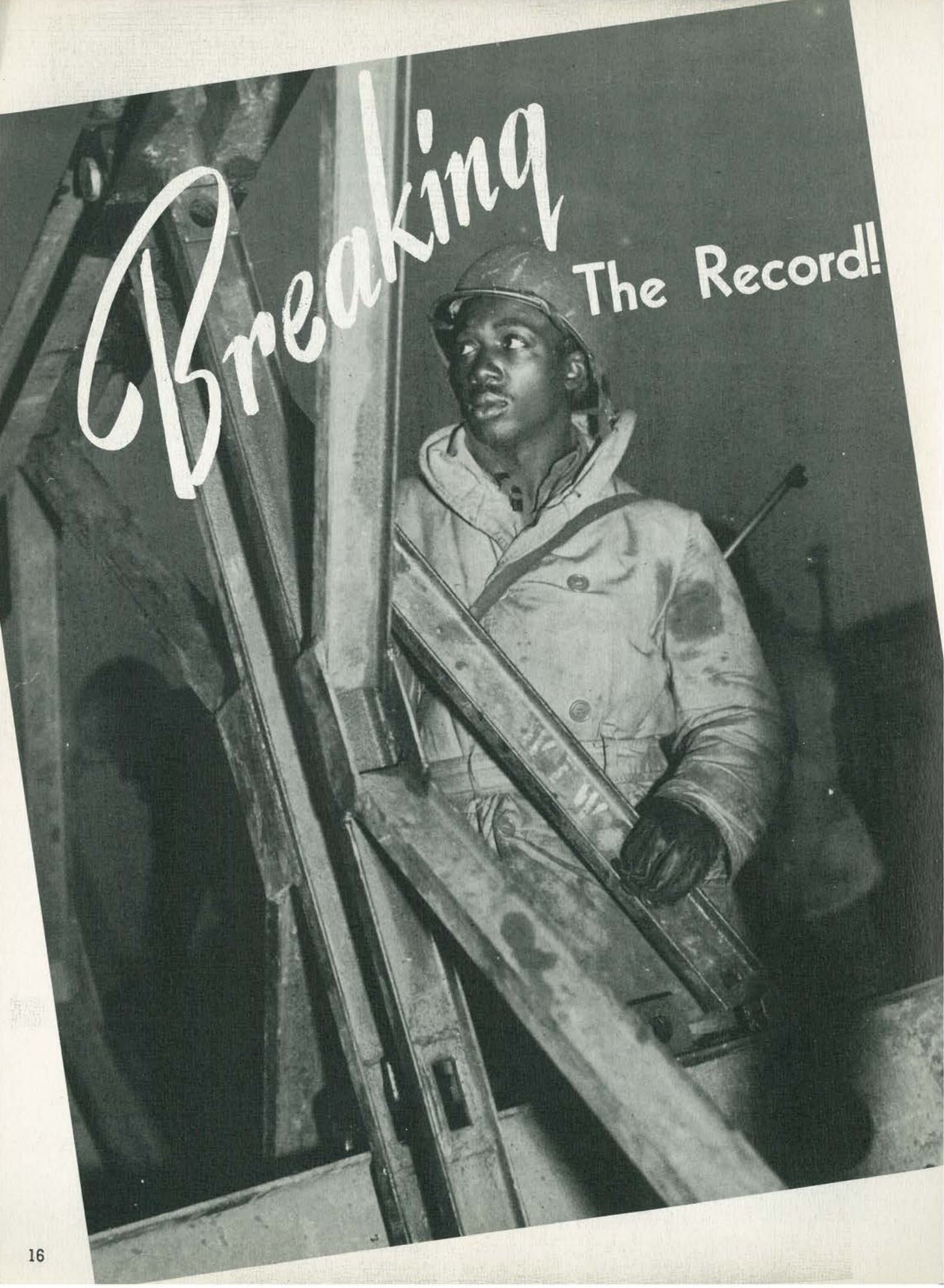
On the 3rd of March at 0530 hours, the "Rolling 549th" rolled out of Camp Peak, Huyton, England, bound for Southampton and France. There were many tears shed by the English lassies when the mighty "Pontoneers" left Huyton, but duty on the front line beckoned and it was no time to back out. Jerry by this time was holding onto the Saar Valley and the last bank of the Rhine, but weakening fast.

The stay at Southampton was not lengthy, but most of us ran into our Jackson pals — the 1700th Engineers. They were also waiting for a boat. It was here that Cpl. Orren Brew found "Skipper", the little black cocker spaniel, who took the war in stride. We received our alert on the 7th of March and loaded up on approximately 10 LCTs and bade England goodbye—temporarily at least.



Breaking

The Record!











ACT 3



Europe

THE trip from Southampton was by night. We could see, leaving the harbor, that we were "Convoying it" and felt a little safer, though there were all sorts of stories on submarines and storms in the English Channel. The boats were small—we carried a few of our trucks on each and there were no bunks in which to sleep.

Fortunately nothing happened during the night and most of the next morning was spent in watching the Naval operations in unloading, which incidentally, was done right on the beach inside the harbor at Le Havre—88 miles from Southampton. We were getting to war fast—this was France already!

Upon arriving at the Le Havre Port the fellows noted that the city was in ruins. The day was rather windy so everyone had his blankets wrapped around him. We tried to see everything that we could. The men and children were walking beside the vehicles asking for cigarettes, candy and chewing gum and peddling wine. After riding for quite some time we finally arrived at Camp Twenty Grand with everyone beginning to look for his "Ace" buddy, so that they could begin comparing experiences. It wasn't until the next day that the others arrived, having had to remain on the LSC (Landing Ship Craft) an extra night. What stories they did have!

Twenty Grand was a fine camp under the present condition and we finally learned our way around the place. There were lots of fellows there with a large red or white arc on the front of their helmet liners. We later learned that these were some of the troops that took part in the Invasion of Normandy. Everyone then began to ask questions of how it felt to have some one shooting at you and a lot of other things about military warfare.

In several days orders were received for us to secure Bailey bridge equipment from the various Engineer Depots in France and Belgium. The officers took off in sections as convoy commanders with the two Pneumatic Bridges, M-3, which was being replaced by the Bailey Bridge equipment. The 549th traveled to Brussels, Cherbourg and Rennes on this trip and returned in two days with stories of how the other parts of France and Belgium was wrecked and the number of graves in the

open fields. This was about the time that everyone began to ask himself how he would act under fire.

We finally left Camp Twenty Grand about dusk one evening, split into three sections. For security reasons, no convoy was to have more than twenty-five (25) vehicles in it, so the other two-thirds of the convoy followed at half hour intervals. Lt. Robert A. Flynn and his advance party left the day before and we were to follow them to a undisclosed destination. There were many rumors going around the company as to what sector of the ETO we were headed and to what Army we would eventually be assigned. As usual most of them proved wrong.

After driving for two blackout nights and a day, passing through Reims, we finally arrived at L'Hopital, France on March 16th at 0430. The only times we would stop were to heat some "C" rations, gas and oil our trucks, or to take a ten-minute break. Most of the fellows had begun to get "combat wise" and heat their rations on the manifolds of the engines. In that way it was ready for eating whenever we stopped. Our journey took us through Nancy. It was here that Pvt. Reginald M. Clay was struck by a vehicle and hospitalized. It was also in this city, while we were gassing, that there was a large explosion which everyone settled for being a V-1 bomb. Driving out further that night, it was "frightening" watching those flashes on the horizon. It was a pleasant sight to see the advance party in L'Hopital because they had everything prepared for us except something to eat. Our hunger was eased however by the "C" rations that we warmed that morning.

We were then attached, for operations, to the 1150th Engineer Combat Group, which was the beginning of a wonderful organizational friendship. There couldn't have been a better group of officers and enlisted men. Of course we were now assigned to the mighty 7th Army and attached to the XXI Corps. The 2nd platoon consisting of 52 men and 20 vehicles, under the guidance of Lt. Flynn, left the village for Sarregumines, France to become attached to the 1145th Engineer Combat Group.

The Light Equipment Platoon was alerted on the 17th of March for the 270th Engineer

Combat Battalion. A few hours later Lt. Baldwin, of the 1150th Group arrived to guide the platoon to Forback. Their assignments were to transport 40 assault boats for the assault crossing in general support of the 70th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Krughuttz and 35 assault boats for crossing in general support of the 63rd Infantry Division near Wehrden. Both assault crossings were to be across the Saar River and each boat crossing was to have an Infantry footbridge near it.

When Lt. Ralph J. Hopkins returned with his Light Equipage Platoon he received as his reward the special orders promoting him to 1st Lieutenant along with Lt. Grier. The 3rd Platoon brought back souvenirs and stories of combat. They were the first of our members on the front lines and what they said left many thoughts in our minds.

Lt. Grier, with his newly won silver bars, departed for Forback with his 1st platoon and was attached to Company "A", 48th Engineer Combat Battalion. They had on their vehicles (17 in number), 130 feet of DS (Double Single) Bailey bridge and their first project was to transport 60 feet of DS for the bridge near Saarbrucken in general support of the 70th Infantry Division. The convoy was delayed for a long time while mines and road blocks were being removed. It was said that on this run, T/5 George Murray smoked two cans of tobacco.

We left L'hospital on March 22 at 1640 and arrived at Bitche six hours later, remaining only for a short time before we pushed off for Pirmasens with Company Headquarters, 1st and 3rd platoons attached, the 2nd platoon still being with the 1145th Group. The same evening most of us saw our first mass of death. Horses, cattle and jerries were lying along the roadside. Nothing had touched us so deeply, yet it was gratifying to see such destruction.

Someone found a cellar full of wine and other stronger beverages, so the fellows began to celebrate their entry into Germany. It was a long time before anyone would drink the stuff because they were afraid it was poisoned. But one brave soldier among the bunch started it off and that was all the others wanted.

Later that same night the company guards discovered approximately a battalion of German troops in our area. Much fire power was brought to bear upon the enemy which resulted in the capture of a number of them. T/5 Fann had the honor of bringing in the first captured jerry.

It was on March 25 that the organization minus the 2nd platoon rolled into Edenkoben and Lt. George B. Lotridge received his special orders promoting him to Captain. There wasn't any Captain bars to be found so he had to make out by pinning two silver lieutenant bars together at the appropriate distance.

The 1st platoon was immediately attached to Company C, 290 Engineer Combat Battalion, while the 2nd platoon was departing from Ruppertaberg. We crossed the Rhine on the 29th at Worms. Our travels took us deeper into Germany. On the last day of March no two platoons were together. The 3rd platoon had

unloaded their Light Equipage and departed for Kaiserlautern to get a load of Bailey bridge, the 2nd platoon closed their CP at Vic Hепенheim. The 1st platoon was attached to H & S Company of 289th Engineer Combat Battalion, while part of the Company headquarters platoon was transporting three complete rafts to Heilbelberg for the Neckar River Crossing and the others were loading 10 sections of rafts and 432 feet of foot bridge for delivery to the 1145th Engineer Combat Group.

Foster found the Company headquarters platoon transporting the Light Equipage equipment to Beerfelden with the other three platoons somewhere in Germany. We remained in Beerfelden for a day before departing for Wall-durn. The 1st platoon reports a fried chicken dinner at Mudow Hotel on Easter night.

Our next stop was Gessigneim. Captain Lotridge and Lieutenant Grier while on one of their many reconnaissance had their jeep wrecked. Lt. Grier landed in the 9th Evacuation Hospital while Capt. Lotridge received only minor scratches.

We left for Konigheim on April 6 and it was here that we came into contact with the other platoons. The major task assignment was the transportation of more than 450 feet of DD (Double Double) by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd platoons in general support of the 12th Armored and 42nd Divisions on April 2 and 3rd. The Bailey bridges were completed near the vicinities of Wertheim, Wurzburg, and Ochensfurt. Some of the fellows saw Lt. Hensley, one of the original members of the 549th Engineer Light Ponton Company and now a member of the 42nd Infantry Rainbow Division.

It was at Kongheim that we suffered our first casualty when Pvt. Theodore Hemphill was injured by fragmentation bomb dropped by an enemy plane on our bivouac area. He was an outpost guard that night and was quickly taken to the 9th Evacuation Hospital. Most of the fellows tasted their first bit of German champagne here when someone brought back a couple of cases from Wurtzburg after liberating a full warehouse. Every night while we were at this bivouac area we were bothered by low flying planes. Capt. Lotridge decided to set up his 50 caliber machine gun crews with line communication to each of them. It reminded us a lot of what we had seen in the show but everyone was wishing that he would let them fly by un-molested. The Company believed it was his ambition to bring down at least one plane. After the bomb had been dropped no one had to be reminded to dig his slit trench. The next morning while the Company was awaiting breakfast, a plane was sighted. It was too far away for anyone to identify and when it banked and headed for our area everyone began running for some kind of cover. It was really funny after we discovered that it was a friendly plane.

General Alexander M. Patch, Commanding General of the Seventh Army, visited us one day and later told Captain Lotridge that he had a damn good looking 1st Sergeant. Of course we had to listen to Sgt. Johnson re-tell it so often for the next month.

The Company mourned the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on the 12th of April, everyone seemed as if he had lost a personal friend. Immediately afterward we departed for Giebelstad, where Pfc. Arthur Nicholson was hurt while trying to fix a tire. A piece of metal struck him under the eye and he, too, was hospitalized at the 9th Evacuation.

We left Giebelstadt April 18 and arrived in Rothernberg a few hours later with Company Headquarters and the 3rd platoon. It was while here that the news got out that we were alerted for combat infantry duty in Kenigheim. Most of the combat engineers were already on the front lines and we were the next to go if things got any worse.

On April 19 a change of officers' duties resulted when Lt. Burch D. Wade, executive officer, was transferred to the 289th Engineer Combat Battalion and Lt. Paul S. Allen came to us in return as Motor Officer. Lt. Grier assumed the duties of Executive Officer and Lt. Staker took his place as Platoon Commander of the 1st Platoon. It was on this same day that Lt. Hopkins, Sgt. Sonia and Pfc. Walter A. Barlow were slightly injured when the jeep ran over a mine and was totally wrecked.

On April 20, Technical Sergeant Elmer G. Barrett, Motor Sergeant, was killed by an enemy mine when he tried to remove the wrecked jeep of Lt. Hopkins from the mine field. Pvt. Spencer B. Hall, the wrecker driver, had to be given medical attention but was not hospitalized. He suffered only minor bruises.

The enemy planes were still bothering us every night and the gun crews stayed alerted all through the night. Captain Lotridge was more determined than ever before to achieve his desire of bringing down an enemy plane.

On April 22 Lt. Wade rejoined us from the 289th Engineer Combat Battalion. He was on temporary duty and immediately joined the Light Equipage Platoon to replace Lt. Hopkins, who was hospitalized. We arrived at Crailsheim the next day and the major assignments of the 2nd and 3rd Platoons were reported. They had built over 250 feet of DS Bailey Bridge for the general support of the 42nd Infantry Division in the vicinities of Neustadt, Lehrsack and Nurnburg on April 17, 19 and 20. The 2nd platoon also completed 80 feet of DS Bailey Bridge near Neunkischen in general support of the 12th Armored Division.

The 1st and 2nd platoons had in the meantime completed four major projects with a total of 400 feet of DS Bailey Bridge in general support of the 4th Infantry Division near Sontheim, Hohenbert, Schwaberg and Lauingen on April 22, 23, 24, and 25 respectively. They were attached to the 48th and 256th Engineer Combat Battalions during this time.

Our next stop was Dilligen, located on the bank of the Danube River, where we became a depot for other engineer organizations. We remained at Dilligen for three days before going to Augsburg on April 30, where we stopped only long enough to heat our "C" rations and be on our way to Furstenfeldbruck, which was just ten miles west of Munich. The 1st platoon went south from Augsburg to Landsberg,

bridged the Leech River, then headed for the snow-covered Alpine Passes.

The first of May found us leaving Furstenfelbruck for Welfratshausen where we found many displaced persons who had been liberated from the German prison and concentration camps. They were freed without any source of food and as they crowded around our mess hall it was very hard for us to eat with them watching us everytime we put the fork to our mouth. Most of the fellows would eat only half of their food and give the rest to them. It was the first time that most of us had seen anyone eating out of the garbage can and we naturally felt sorry for them. It was here that we picked up two Polish refugees, Heintz and Martin, as interpreters. One could play the piano, the other was a violinist. They gave us many days of entertainment before they left us in June. The Headquarters Battery of the 515th Field Artillery furnished us with 14 trucks and drivers for the purpose of transporting Bailey Bridge on this leg of the journey.

The 1st and 2nd platoons were attached to the 286th Engineer Combat Battalion at this time, where they reinforced 140 feet of DS Bailey Bridge with four bays of DD in the center near Murnau and completed 80 feet of DS Bailey Bridge at Bad Telz. Both of these projects were in general support of the 12th Armored Division, Combat Commands A and B.

The 3rd platoon was the last to finish its mission, and was in support of the 101st Airborne Division and the 1st French Army as well as attached to the 48th Engineer Combat Battalion for the construction of three Bailey Bridges, 400 feet, to open the road-net to Berchtesgaden. The last bridge, which totaled 200 feet in length, was completed on May 8th and the boys really proceeded to celebrate V-E Day "royally" in Hitler's "Nest". The 2nd platoon finished at Kufstein, Austria and the 1st platoon rested on the magnificent Chiem Sea, not far from Berchtesgaden.

We were still at Degerndorf when the news reached us that Germany surrendered. Rumors were rife about what was going to happen next. Some of them even had us going to Italy but on May 13th we departed for Oringen, Germany back toward the Rhine.

There were no changes in assignment and attachments during our days in France and Germany. The 549th Engineer Light Ponton Company remained assigned to the Sixth Army Group, Seventh Army, attached to the XXI Corps and assigned to the 1150th Engineer Combat Group for operational duty.

A lot of hard work awaited us when we reached Oringen on May 13th getting our vehicles and equipment ready to move closer to France and eventually the United States of America.

The first Battle was over for the 549th Engineers — the Battle for the Saar River. It ended in complete victory and an opening for capturing the rest of the Rhine Valley for the Allies. For the Germans, it was the beginning of the end of their grasp on the Western shoreline of the Rhine.

Roster -

THERE would be no better time for us to pause in our little story and see just what each member of the 549th was doing at the beginning of the battle. So herewith is a chart aligning each member of the "PONTONEERS" with "His part in the Battle of Germany."

OFFICERS

Capt. George B. Lotridge, Commanding Officer	1st Lt. George A. Grier Plat. Ldr. (1st)
1st Lt. Burch D. Wade Admin. Officer	1st Lt. Robert A. Flynn Plat. Ldr. (2nd)
1st Lt. Don H. Staker Motor Officer	1st Lt. James R. Hopkins Plat. Ldr. (3rd)

ENLISTED MEN

MOTOR POOL SECTION

T/Sgt. Elmer G. Barrett Motor Sgt.
T/4 Thomas Brooks Shop Foreman
T/4 Eugene Crowder Shop Foreman
T/4 Eulas McArthur Shop Foreman
T/4 Joe Brown Shop Foreman
T/4 Abe Morris, Jr. Shop Foreman
T/5 John D. Anderson Mechanic
T/5 Samuel Oliver Wrecker Driver
T/5 James Brice Mechanic
Pvt. Julius Day Mechanic
PFC Joseph Williams Mechanic
T/5 Herman Fields Parts Man
Pvt. Hence Fowler Sign Painter
PFC Floyd W. Francis Hq. Dispatcher
T/5 James Thornton Hq. Dispatcher
Pvt. Spencer B. Hall Parts Truck Driver
PFC Melvin Moore Asst. Parts Man
PFC Arthur L. Nicholson . . Chief Sign Painter
T/5 Warren G. Shanks Welder
Pvt. Bayard B. Taylor P.O.L. Section
Pvt. Joseph Pyndell P.O.L. Section
PFC Henry W. Williams . . Wrecker Operator
Pvt. Spencer B. Hall, Wrecker Operator (Asst.)

S-1 SECTION

Sgt. Evan T. Guess Personnel Sgt. Major
PFC William Jarratt Company Clerk
T/5 Maryland Curry Mail and Message
Center Clerk
PFC Johnnie D. Townsend Courier
PFC William V. Austin Company Aid Man
PFC Harvey N. Jones . . Bugler and Messenger

S-2 SECTION

Sgt. Evan T. Guess Decoder
T/4 Lewis R. Hurt Cryptographer

S-3 SECTION

M/Sgt. John A. Harrison, Construction Foreman
PFC Walter A. Barlow Operations Clerk
PFC James Boone Demolition Expert

S-4 SECTION

S/Sgt. Manchester Lopez Supply Sgt.
T/4 Robert L. Fann Stock Record Clerk
T/5 James Presely Tool Cpl.
Pvt. Shadrack Haynes . . Ammunition Handler
Pvt. Augustus Brown Supply Truck Driver

COMMUNICATION SECTION

T/4 Lewis R. Hurt Communication Chief
 PFC Calvin Cage Radio Operator
 PFC Audley F. Connor, Jr. Radio Operator
 T/5 Chester L. Gougis Radio Operator
 PFC Henry Franklin, Jr. Wire Chief
 PFC Alexander Tomlin .. Telephone Operator
 PFC Louis Hoodye Telephone Operator
 PFC William Ferguson .. Telephone Operator
 PFC Ernest Jeannard Field Linesman
 PFC Yancey Tubbs Field Linesman
 PFC Louis A. Ferguson Field Linesman

COMPANY HEADQUARTERS

1/Sgt. James E. Johnson 1st Sgt.
 Pvt. Willie R. Robinson Orderly
 S/Sgt. William L. Brewer Mess Sgt.
 T/4 Tommie Jones, Jr. 1st Cook
 T/5 Clarence Tittle 2nd Cook
 T/5 Clarence Conway 2nd Cook
 T/5 Frank Johnson 2nd Cook
 PFC John R. Brown 3rd Cook
 PFC Christopher Mathias 3rd Cook
 PFC Reginald Clay 3rd Cook
 PFC Lorenzer Gresham Cooks Helper
 Pvt. Junior Lee Cooks Helper
 PFC Willie Boyd Company Carpenter
 PFC Alfred N. Jacobs Company Carpenter
 PFC Fred McWhorter Air Comp. Operator
 T/4 Milton Green Crane Operator
 T/5 Kenneth P. Priestly Crane Driver

PLATOON SGTS.

S/Sgt. Weldon D. Bryant 1st Platoon
 S/Sgt. Wilson R. Forney 2nd Platoon
 S/Sgt. Merrial Moody 3rd Platoon

SECTION CHIEFS

Sgt. Aubrey Evans 1st Platoon
 Sgt. Leon Wilburn 1st Platoon
 Sgt. David L. Poe 2nd Platoon
 Sgt. Russell E. Washington 2nd Platoon
 Sgt. Alphonse Haynes 3rd Platoon
 Sgt. Sidney C. Arnold 3rd Platoon
 Sgt. Willie Bobo 3rd Platoon

SQUAD LEADERS

Cpl. Charles Jolivet 1st Platoon
 Cpl. Orren Brew 1st Platoon
 Cpl. Perly Richardson 1st Platoon
 Cpl. Zeb B. Manns 2nd Platoon
 Cpl. John W. Robinson 2nd Platoon
 Cpl. Stanley Short 2nd Platoon
 Cpl. Ostell Martin 3rd Platoon
 Cpl. Virgil Hightower 3rd Platoon
 Cpl. Jinse Jackson 3rd Platoon
 Cpl. Lawrence Cooks 3rd Platoon

MOTORBOAT OPERATORS

Pvt. Henry Andrews
 Pvt. William Battles (Asst. Truck Driver)
 PFC Rembert Belton (Asst. Squad Leader)

Pvt. Bennie Clay (Asst. Truck Driver)
 Pvt. Eddie Freeman (Asst. Truck Driver)
 PFC Louis A. Morris (Power Launch, Asst. Truck Driver)

Pvt. George A. St. Martin
 PFC Robert L. Robinson
 PFC Alonzo Scott
 PFC A. L. Smith

TRUCK DRIVERS

T/5 Alvin T. Austin PFC Ed McCormick
 Pvt. Eddie Black PFC Frank McMillian
 Pvt. James T. Bracey (Jeep)
 Pvt. Casey Branch Pvt. James Miles
 T/5 James Brice PFC Vernon Mitchell
 T/5 George A. Brown T/5 William Mixion
 T/5 Leon Brown Pvt. R. B. Monroe
 T/5 Adam H. Brown Pvt. George E. Murray
 Pvt. Augustus Brown (Diamond T)
 PFC Victor Bryant Pvt. James Newberry
 PFC Benjamin Bryant PFC William Oden
 T/5 Rufus Butler PFC David Parker
 Pvt. Calvin Cage T/5 Ernest W. Patterson
 PFC Henry Chancler Pvt. William Payne
 Pvt. Woodrow Clark Pvt. Thomas Price
 Pvt. Wallace Clark T/5 Kimmie Price
 PFC A. F. Connor, Jr. Pvt. Joseph Pyndell
 Cpl. L. Cooks (Jeep) Pvt. Edward Queens
 Pvt. Willie Crockett (Diamond T)
 (Weapons Carrier) Pvt. Jesse L. Rice
 PFC Adam Davis PFC Whitney Rodgers
 (Jeep) (Jeep)
 Pvt. Clarence DeBerry PFC Robert C. Roy
 PFC Vatchell Denson PFC Alonzo Scott
 T/5 John A. Edison Pvt. James L. Shelman
 Pvt. Andrew Floyd Pvt. Samuel Simpkins
 Pvt. Spencer B. Hall PFC Hezekiah Small
 Pvt. Theo. Hemphill PFC John R. Smith
 T/5 Pollard Henderson PFC Homer Smith, Jr.
 Pvt. John M. Hines PFC John W. Smith
 T/5 Daniel Houston PFC Curtis Smith
 PFC George Howard PFC A. L. Smith
 T/5 Frank L. Howard PFC Robert D. Sneed
 T/5 Purnell Jefferson T/5 Edward F. Stevenson
 PFC Godfrey Johnson (Diamond T)
 Pvt. Houston Johnson PFC Charlie Summers
 T/5 Joe S. Johnson Pvt. Bayard B. Taylor
 Pvt. Eldrew Jones (Jeep)
 PFC Tommie Jones T/5 Emmett Taylor
 PFC Bobby Lary PFC Luke Thompson
 (Diamond T) PFC J. D. Townsend
 PFC Willis Washington (Jeep)
 Pvt. James F. Watkins PFC Yancey Tubbs
 Pvt. Elijah White PFC Frederick Tuggle
 T/5 Johnnie Woods PFC Charles Varner
 PFC Clarence Lee Pvt. John Wade, Jr.
 T/5 Lorenzo McAlpin (Diamond T)

ASSISTANT DRIVERS

Pvt. Henry Austin Pvt. Wm. Jimmerson
Pvt. Vincent Broadnax Pvt. Leon L. Jones
Pvt. Ardell Clark Pvt. Clarence E. Ketchum
PFC John E. Clifton Pvt. Joseph Lewis
Pvt. John W. Clyburn Pvt. Southern Osborne
Pvt. Robert A. Culver PFC Granville Richards
PFC Leroy Davis Pvt. Vernon Saunders
PFC Henry Franklin, Jr. Pvt. St. Elmore Sims
Pvt. Eddie Freeman PFC Larkin Stanley

Pvt. Ozel Graham Pvt. Purcell Strowbridge
Pvt. Harvest Hall PFC Emile Turner
Pvt. Lathus W. Hall Pvt. Isaiiah Turner
Pvt. Jesse Heard PFC L. C. Venson
Pvt. M. C. Hood Pvt. George W. Wallace
PFC Matthew Hunter PFC Joseph Williams
Pvt. Ollie Jackson (Stock Clerk)

TRACTOR DRIVERS

PFC J. C. Patterson PFC Robert L. Hamilton
PFC Robert H. Henry

ACT 4

Post War

EVERYONE wondered what we would be doing back at Ohringen, but apparently our headquarters didn't know either. About all anyone wanted to know "was how soon he was going home?" Shortly after our withdrawal from Bavaria, the War Department decided to release men by the point system. In the 549th it caused as much confusion as ever, because the only persons eligible under the May and V-E scores were T/5 Herman Fields and Pvt. Walter Jefferson. But all the rest of us signed the little card and hoped for a change. We lost two of the Company standbys, Pvts. Willie Robinson and Shadrack Haynes who were sent back to the States and discharged for old age.

The big job at Ohringen was maintenance. Sgt. Short had been brought from the field by Lt. Allen to be the acting Motor Sergeant. Along with Shop Foreman T/4 Thomas Brooks, they whipped up a garage that would outshine any Motor Shop in the Army. It wasn't only just polish—they put out the work. Each vehicle had a six-thousand mile check before it left Germany and for the good production line activity they were given commendations by the Seventh Army Engineer.

The war over, the Army had many problems. The big one was the nonfraternization policy that General Ike set down for his troops. We remember the little technicalities it involved and how hard it was now to talk to a civilian. We did as well as the rest. Then too, the Army had its recreational program. The "PONTONEERS" offered real resistance in this league. In May we had inter-company league which brought battle between the first and second Platoons, but before long we began to

entertain outside teams who challenged us. The lineup we had was too much for them—Murray, Woods, Barlow, Pic Johnson, Tommie Jones, "Boots" Broadnax, Tuggle, Washington, Forney, Wilburn, Guess, Turner, Homer Smith and Tenmard. The 1150th Enlisted Men never were able to squeeze a win from us, nor were the officers though they gave us quite a lot of trouble. There were about a dozen outfits that always gave us a try, but we "outranked" them.

The field on which we played ball was dedicated in honor of T/Sgt. Elmer G. Barrett, who was the sole member of the 549th Engineers to lose his life during combat. It was a fitting service and conducted by our favorite group — — Chaplain Pliney Elliot.

We started getting passes and furloughs. Some of the men got to see Paris, some Brussels, others the Riviera. The Neckar River was close by and we had time enough to get a few boats up there before leaving Germany.

The first part of June marked a change in the organization again. Lt. George A. Grier assumed command in the place of Capt. George B. Lotridge and Lt. Ralph Hopkins, released from the hospital, was now present for duty. Second Lt. Marvin R. Hedberg joined the company as the new Administrative Officer. Leon Wilburn, through his energetic bounds, was promoted to First Sergeant, Sgt. Stanley Short to Motor and Staff Sergeant, and Sgt. Chester Gougis for his undivided attention to the 3rd Platoon was likewise promoted to Staff Sergeant. Cpl. Brew had come to the line to occupy a section chief's job and rated three stripes. There were massive promotions throughout the company based on the achieve-



Butter, McWhorter, A. L. Smith

DAYS at

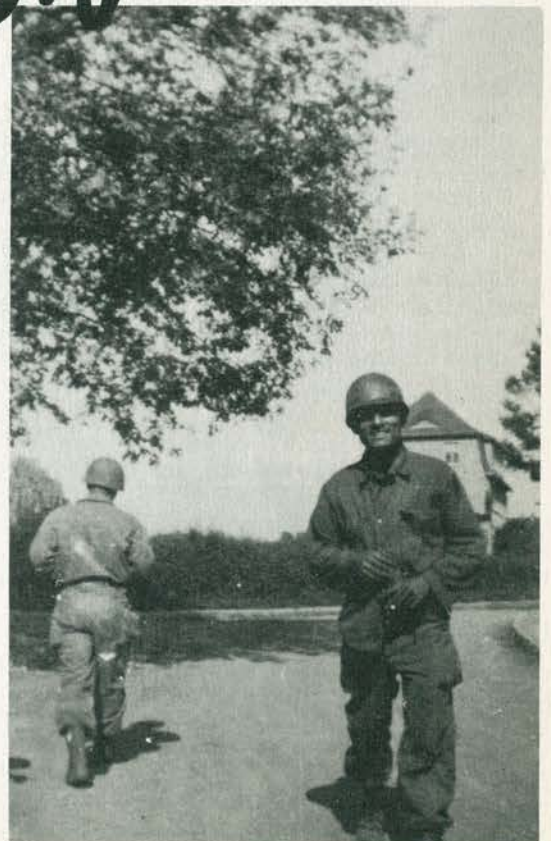
Ohringen



McWhorter, "Skipper", Connor



A. L. Smith, Johnnie Townsend



Deberry . . . Promenading

ments of the men who earned such recognition through the Campaign of the Rhineland and the Battle of Europe.

On the 13th of June an alert was sneaked in on us and we put two and two together and hoped that it would be the good ole U.S.A. There was turmoil and confusion, but the 549th rolled again—bound for Camp Lucky Strike via Heidelberg, Mannheim, Kaiserslautern, Saarbrücken, Metz, Verdun, Reims, Soisson, Compeigne, and Rouen. It was almost the identical round or route we had taken south just three months previous and may we say that this trip was just a bit more pleasant to take. We hit the IP on the nose at each point and finally rested at Lucky Strike amid its dust and many "thousands"—waiting.

We turned most all our equipment in, had those many show-downs and you-know-whats, and were in the midst of again visiting the Engineer Depot to get rid of trailers and trucks. The disappointment struck deep—it seemed that we were to be stuck for a few more weeks "helping boys get home". Some say had we got by that last depot we would have been on that boat, the rest say it was just nice to get that close to the boat. Ah Oui!

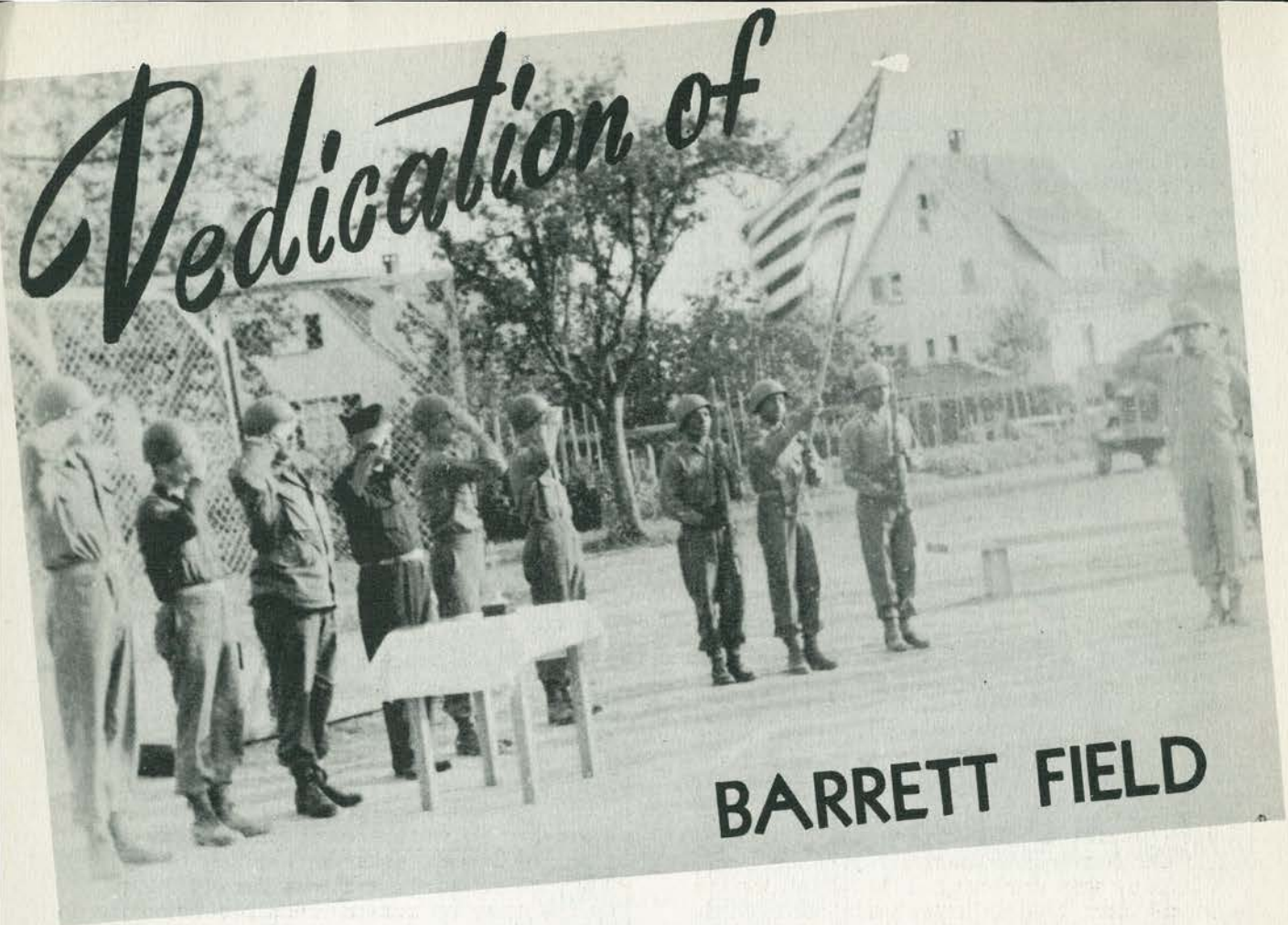
We immediately moved over to a little camp of our own—Camp Neville, which is located within walking distance of the little French village of Neville. The village proper consisted of a large church, railroad station, small cafe, bakery and dance hall where the "PONTONEERS" learned to cut a French rug with the local Mademoiselles.

The camp was made up of Nissen huts, enclosed in a double fence manner. It was well equipped with Chapel, mess hall, and movies. In the center of the court was a fish pond. The place was ours and we jumped right in to make it another of our "temporary homes." Nick Nicholson and Hence Fowler made up several fancy engineer signs, shaped like the Engineer Castle and enscrolled with the unit's number and slogan, "Home of the Pontoneers". T/4 McArthur came back to the unit as did "Tex" Oliver and the bunch proceeded to "give out". Our mission was to transport supplies necessary for the completion of Camp Lucky Strike and the adjoining "Cigarette Camp". It was a job—a full-time one at that. It meant knowing the roadnets of France, keeping a super-human maintenance

check on everyone of our 60-odd vehicles, trailers, tractors and cranes. It meant that we must have a fleet of drivers capable of "taking it" ten or twelve or more hours daily, seven days a week. Furthermore, it meant complete revision of the regular Company duties and schedules, the irregularity of which was never experienced in "garrison life". In all it meant harder work than much of the time we were in combat. The purpose behind it was redeployment of troops to the Pacific, shipment of high point men to the States, and a general change-over in policies of the European Theatre. Even though it looked like a hopeless and endless task—the gang dived in to start the ball rolling.

Le Havre, Rouen, Alizay, Cany, Cherbourg and Brussels. In any of these towns the 549th Engineer Light Ponton Company could usually be found bringing home anything from lumber to complete household furnishings. Almost each day approximately 50 trucks ran this Northern France network of cities and supply dumps. From the 20th of June through early October, the "Pontoneers" played its part in getting troops home by helping in the major construction program launched by the Chanor Base Section of the United States Forces, European Theatre.

For individual recognition, the spotlight of credit was on the drivers who kept the goods rolling in—men like Butler, Leon Brown, Harvest Hall, Alphonse Haynes, Hines, Houston, Purnell Jefferson, Godfrey Johnson, Jolivet, Bobby Lary, Mac Alpin, Merrial Moody, George Murray, David Parker, Kimmie Price, Scott, Small Stanley, Edward Stevenson, Fred Tuggle, Willis Washington. The man running the whole show was S/Sgt. Weldon Bryant, who handled the situation as a master. His capable assistants were Sgt. Brew, Washington, and Patterson—the men who ran the roads and kept their sections intact through the changing personnel conditions during the summer months. Corporals Zeb Manns and James Boone and Pfc. Louis Morris were the book-keepers and knew every ailment of each truck in their respective sections. And to keep the trucks rolling were the "Shortmen"—T/4 Brooks, Crowder, Joe Brown, Henry and Joe Williams, Brice, Edison, Fields, Moore, Nicholson, Fowler, Jacobs, Shanks, and Rice. Their task was a larger one than those found in most Battalions. Naturally chow time was most



any time on these trying days of watching the many thousand troops pass on their homeward journey, therefore S/Sgt. Popeye Brewer Conway, Mathias, John R. Brown, Mathew Hunter, Cooksey, Ben Bryant and Clarence Tittle were the main disherouters. Then there was Sgt. Evans, whose job was to keep the POWs on the move. S/Sgt. Forney gained recognition during the summer during construction of a Post Officers' Club designed by Lt. Robert Flynn, Platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon and later designated as Project Engineer of Camp Twenty Grand.

Shortly after our arrival at Camp Neville, we had a company meeting at which the CO, Lt. Grier, asked for entertainment suggestions and quite naturally it meant another of these famous 549th Engineer Dances. This was the most appropriate time to combine a dance and presentation of the Bronze Star Medals won by several members of the Company. The arrangements were carried on by Sgt. "Baldy" Guess. Invitations were sent out to the WACs of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion in Rouen, a band from 354th Infantry Regiment was engaged and the usual choices of the kitchen crew in the way of fried chicken gave promise of true times.

On Sunday afternoon, 8 July 1945, the Company was drawn up in formation for the Bronze Star Medal presentation. Col. O. B. Beasley, Commanding Officer of the 40th Engineer Combat Group was on hand to decorate each man who had the honor of winning one of the 14 "meritorious service" medals awarded the Company. In an impressive ceremony the men decorated were flanked by members of their own unit and WAC guests, and each citation was read as Col. Beasley congratulated the proud bearer of the Bronze Star Medal. Those decorated included: 1st Lt. George A. Grier, for service rendered in the transport of Bailey Bridge in the Seventh Army Campaign, 1st Lt. Robert A. Flynn, for delivering Bailey Bridge; S/Sgt. Weldon D. Bryant, for supervision of Bailey Bridge Transport Platoon. Members of the Company not present for the presentation and awarded the Bronze Star Medal were Lt. James R. Hopkins, for delivering Bailey Bridge; 1st Lt. Burch D. Wade for Administration and delivering Bailey Bridge.

Following the presentation of awards was

the feast prepared by the kitchen staff. This ushered in an evening of dancing pleasure under the grove of apple trees at Camp Neville, with musical renditions by the 549th's own "PONTONEERS" and our newest company member, Pvt. Albert Cooper, who could apply the "swoon tactics" to most any song. For those movie-goers, 1st Sgt. Wilburn's committee had selected one of the best cinema shows of Lucky Strike's "Current Attractions".

There were many changes in the 549th's roster after the middle of July. Automobile accidents claimed the lives of George "Gab" Brown and Cpl. Jince Jackson. Pfc. Rembert Belton returned to the States because of injuries as had Cpl. Lawrence Cooks and "Big Red" Vertner Austin, earlier in the summer. All of these men made very noticeable shortages in the Company and their exploits in the "German War" are still being discussed. Forty-three of the old bunch were transferred to the 435th Dump Truck Company in Le Havre while the Company began to take on the "85 pointers" in return. The loss was tremendous for we lost men who made the wheels turn for the Pontoneer fleet. Homer Smith, A. L. Smith, Bracey, Pic Johnson, Polard Henderson were on the list. So were several others. It meant for the next few weeks the juggling of high point men, interdispersed with the old "Regulars", to carry on transportation requirements. Despite "beaucoup" rank (we had two first sergeants, 14 Staff Sergeants) the mission was accomplished.

Perhaps it may be interesting to make a few comparisons of the many accomplishments made by the 549th. Since activation the unit moved a total of 7,700 miles as a body. There have been a total of 890 men assigned at one time or another—the greatest number at any one time being 275. During combat the "PONTONEERS" took part in the construction of 95 bridges, which amounted to a total of 9,000 feet of bridging. Not only can we build the Bailey, but we have actively been engaged in the Steel Treadway and the M-3 Pneumatic, a total of three bridges. In post-war operations in France the 549th's fleet of trucks went more than six times around the world or roughly, 150,000 miles, hauling 3,600 tons of construction materials. And not only that but there are two campaign stars on the ETO ribbons of each



Pontoneers

**FRONT
AND
CENTER**



man and the first Anniversary is to be celebrated shortly after the publication of this book.

As we turn the last page, we see those with high points, Wilburn (with twins) have 83 points, Short, Oliver, Butler, etc. Then there are those eager "OLD" men. Venson, Brown, Heard, Morris, Haynes, etc. The rest of us—well everytime the War Department lowers the critical score, we start anew, dreaming of a 1945 Christmas dinner in the good ole U.S.A.

History, that could be the word for it. We surely were a part of it and shared in the hardships and pleasures met in our overseas journey. There is but one more objective in our minds—a trip to the States, a white piece of paper known as a "DISCHARGE" then we'll tell you all about it.

As the last pages of this book are being written, we find a number of things have happened to the "PONTONEERS".

On the 15th of October 1945, the 549th Engineers departed Neville, France, for Bolbec, France. Arriving there at 1500 hours the same day, the 549th took over the operation of the Bolbec box factory, supervising the work of 150 German prisoners. This was rather new to the gang, but in true "Pontoneer" spirit, a record number of boxes was turned out.

Next, we lost all of our 60 and 70 point men, "Baldy Guess", "Chattanooga Red" Townsend, "Old Soldier" Huston, "Wash" Washington, "Big Joe" Williams, "Hipster" Thornton Crowder, "Sack" Bryant and many others. In

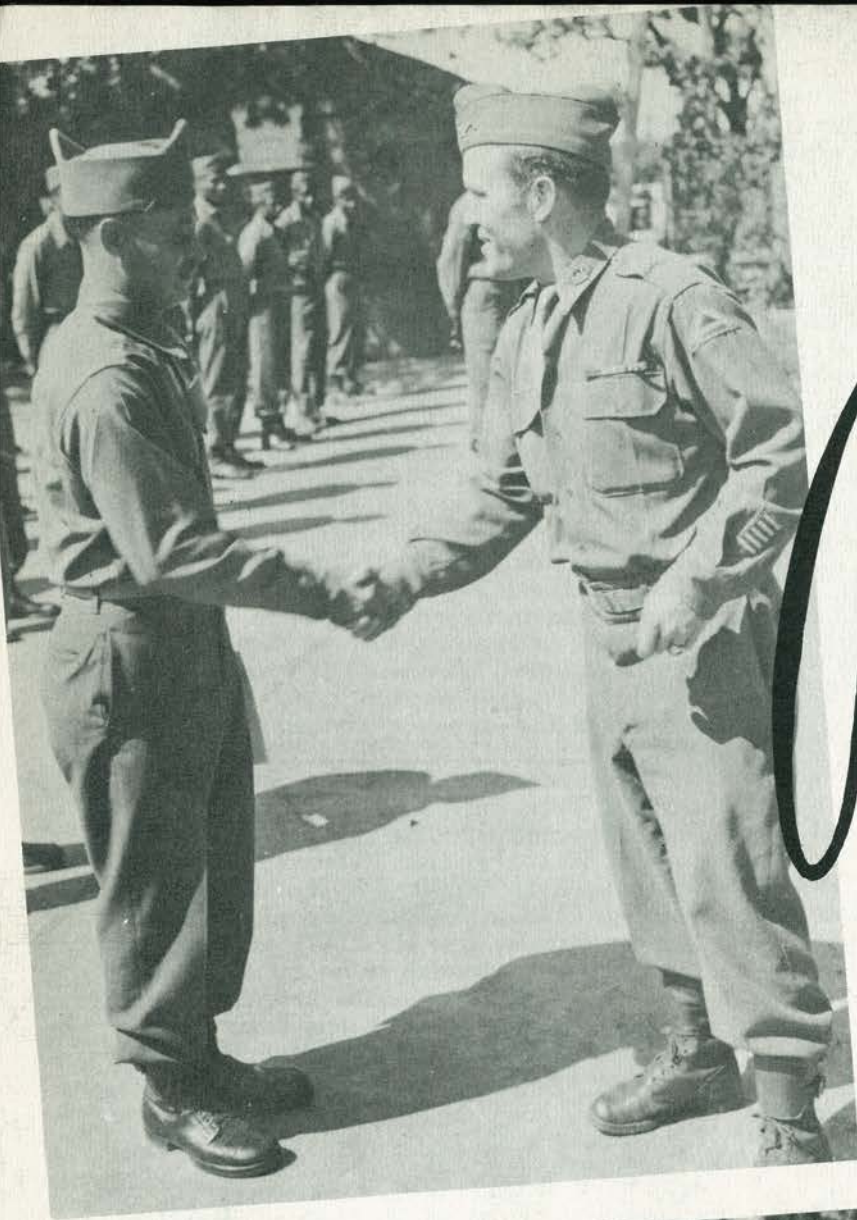
return we received just about all of the original "Pontoneers" who were sent to the 435th Engineer D.T. Co. "Rice" Bracey, Curtis Smith, "Bulldog" Arnold, Eddie Black, "Pete" Smith, A. L. Smith, Wallace Clark, Frank Johnson, "Charlie" Cage, Chancellor, Summers, "Dr." Denson, Varner and the rest of the old gang.

There were some who decided to become regular Army men, Crockett, Benson, Eldrew Jones, Summers, Fowler, "Doghouse" Hines, Little Ferguson, and Junior Lee. These men left us for 90-day furloughs in the States and will probably be eating Christmas Dinner at home.

While at Bolbec, the 549th got a basketball team together, with such "greats", of the hardwood court as "Little Mal" Hands, "Big Stoop" Turner, "Big Marv" Simmons, "Charlie Cage" who made up the starting five, with such men as reserves; George Howard, Preston Washington, "The Saint" St. Martin, "Vern" Mitchell, "Little" Hoodye and "Big" Louis Ferguson. The team was coached by Pfc. Conner.

As this book goes to press, we see, Fann, Martin, Evans, McArthur, Brew and Patterson as staff sergeants, Jolivet and Robinson as sergeants, Pedro Francis as corporal, Roy, Rodgers, Hoodye, Parker, Jefferson as Tech 5s. Cooper, Clyburn, DeMunn, Hands, and Jackson as Privates first class. We also see the "Pontoneers" preparing to return to Germany and who knows what awaits them there.

Incidentally the 549th has been made a Regular Army Unit as a tribute to the grand job they turned in as a AUS outfit.



Forward

of the . . .





1st Lt. George A. Grier receives a Bronze Star

BRONZE STAR



T/4 Milton Green receives congratulations from Col. E. J. Dowling at Bronze Star ceremony



S/Sgt. Stanley J. Short receives the congratulations from Col. E. J. Dowling at Bronze Star ceremony



S/Sgt. Weldon D. Bryant receives a Bronze Star



S/Sgt. Wilson Forney receives congratulations from Col. E. J. Dowling



the
**BRONZE
STAR . . .**



Dance





The
**CURTAIN
FALLS**

the

Last PARAGRAPH

AND so the 549th Engineer comes to a stop, as he sits down to take a well-earned rest, he knocks the dirt from his spikes, for it is plenty; his spikes have gathered dirt from four states, the Atlantic Ocean, England, The English Channel, France, Germany and Austria. While he sits there, his thoughts turn to the many things he has done and seen since activation at Camp Hood, Texas, in the month of April. He thinks about the many men (GIs) who have been with him, he also thinks about the many who started this great race with him and the ones who dropped out somewhere along the line. He smiles as he thinks to himself. It was a job and a job well done. So the curtain comes down on this great show, for it has been truly a great show, packed with excitement, plenty of action, gay moments and sad moments. The 549th takes its last bow. So the story goes and the history of the accomplishments of one of the Army's most colorful Engineer Light Ponton Company is at an end.

Lest we forget, our sincere thanks goes to the men who have made this book possible.

1st Lt. George A. Grier
1st Lt. Robert A. Flynn
1st Sgt. Leon Wilburn
T/4 Lewis R. Hurt
Sgt. Evan T. Guess
Pfc. Audley F. Conner
Pvt. Malcolm Hands

Connor, Udney H.
F.A.R.

