Foreword

When wars are written about, they typically say the 9th, 8th, 7th, 1st, 3rd, etc Armies won the War. Now, you know they didn't but they still get the credit. Corps, that make up the Armies, complain that they don't get enough credit, that the Armies take it all.

Ironic isn't it when you realize that neither won the War. It was actually the GI's that made up the Battalions, Corps and the Armies that did the dirty work of killing, shelling, blowing up of bridges, stormed shores, suffered untold agonies, and built the bridges that won the War, not the faceless Armies, Corps, or Divisions.

GI's truly are the ones that should have received the accolades yet they receive none. These are the loved ones that do the dieing for their countries at the behest of the failure of spineless old men in any country to say "NO" to an irrational who just happens to be their Leader. I think when Wars are declared, the Leader and all members of his "Congress" should be the first in the front lines to show the young (that will follow them in death) the courage of their convictions and prove that the cause is just and worthy of their deaths. If there was a just war, WWll may have qualified but, the others since, were not worth the lives lost or maimed.

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This is the story of the vagaries of my military career. I almost became a Conscientious Objector based on ingrained religious teachings pounded into me during childhood but finally succumbed. I went to war, just like about 11 million drafted other Americans did - against their wills, who did not want to go on the killing spree that is a must in War, were fearful of dieing, or even if they survived, hated to waste X number of years of their lives trying to restore some semblance of order in the always warring European world.

I look back now and see utter warring chaos in the world, a failed United Nations Agency unwilling to prevent such things and, I realize it was not worth the WWll effort to save the world from its mad rush to oblivion. I look at the unjustified war in Iraq (split into three warring factions) and see a miniature squabbling Europe, wherein each country wants to be an entity of its own, not wanting to merge in a common bond for the good of all. Economic greed and the "I don't think it can happen" philosophy still rules the world while clear signs of pending doom are glibly rationalized and ignored: melting polar ice caps, greenhouse (ozone) gases, mercury and pesticide poisoning, acid rain, alarming scarcity of oceanic foods, vanishing species, destruction of the forest shields, vanishing farm lands despite starvation in the United States as well as in other countries, burning of corn and other grains to feed cars instead of people, genocides caused by over population and lack of foods, dust bowls, corporate outsourcing that literally creates a steady slave labor market to take advantage of a ready pool of starving peoples of Mexico, India, Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, etc, ignoring the significance of shifting populations to other countries, ad nausea. Then, I remember Malthus. His prognostication will eventually come true; and, I hope that Man does not escape into Space to establish another warring world, thus ruining another pristine world.

Nick

A BRIEF
WWII HISTORY OF
NICK DRAHOS
JULY 10, 1942 THROUGH 1 JAN 1946

My story is typical. Every GI can write something like this. Prior to my Draft into the US Army, I had played a season of football in the fall of 1941 with the NY Americas in the new American Pro Football League that had been formed to compete with the National Football league. I had been drafted by the Cleveland Rams but the NY Americans offered twice the salary and fewer games. So, not having a job, I opted to go with the Americans. I knew my tenure of freedom would be brief because I had just graduated from Cornell University at Ithaca, NY and the US had entered World War II and was drafting men to fight it; and, I was a man.

After the end of the Pro Football season in late November, I was fortunately offered a job that delayed my entry in the war. Mr. Dodd, a Superintendent of Schools in the Town of Hempstead, Long Island New York, being a very influential citizen pleaded his case to the Draft Board of his need of a teacher and secured a special dispensation for me to teach the initial class of FLORICULTURE, AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION thus, enabling me to dodge the draft through June 1942. This school was my former High School that had been converted to a combination of grade and a vocational trade school. It offered practical courses in automotive repair and maintenance, Horticulture, Landscaping (etc), Electrical, radio and TV repair, and Woodcraft. I had a newly built greenhouse and a plot of ground of about 200' x 200' for use as a combination vegetable and horticultural garden experimentation area. Although the Horticulture part was a new field for me, it was not that difficult to teach. I also I knew Agriculture while Conservation was my major in college. As a wildlife biologist at Cornell, I had taken most of the Botany plant identification courses, I knew gardening from practical experience, and I had a basic idea of what it took to produce a pleasing formation of lawns and plants around houses. I spent the month of December making a course outline and proceeded to read books and magazines so that I could explain the theories behind the placement of plants in Landscaping, and keep one step ahead of the students. I also had to study Greenhouse culture and gave lessons on various phases of its usages. When the school ended in June, I got my draft notice.

I was drafted on July 10, 1942, went by Long Island RR to Staten Island, NY where a Doctor listened to my heart, looked at my teeth, checked my short arm for venereal diseases, and said I was fit to die. I was then given a 2 week respite to get my past life in order, make a Will, and told to report to Fort Monmouth, NJ on 23 July 1943. Monmouth was normally a Signal Corps Electronic complex that, in addition, had been converted into an Army Induction Area. Here, draftees were housed, had short arms inspected, and then interviewed to find out what they had been trained to do or at what trade they had been working at prior to the Draft. Finally, they were placed in the various Army companies that compose a Division, with the hope that these companies could function properly with the assemblage of jerks and geniuses that were sent to them, and thus help win the war.

I told the interviewer that I had been a Teacher, had a BS degree as a Fish & Wildlife Biologist whereupon, for some reason, he stuck me in the Signal Corps as a Lineman. So much for a college education and making the best use of man-power! With my training I should really have been placed in a Medical Corps as a Zoologist (in Epidemiology) to say the least. But no, I was declared fit to climb telephone poles and string wire! Such is life. I had drawn a *Non compos mentis* in the form of my interviewer.

At Monmouth, draftees were issued Dog Tags I. D's (2 brass coated medal rectangular plates on which your name, Army Serial Number, Blood Type, and Religion were imbedded. Those you hung

around your neck and never took off. If you were killed, one stayed with your corpse to identify it so that they could put your name on a cross while the other was sent to the guy who tallied up the dead in the War Department (I think). If you were captured, all you were supposed to divulge to the enemy was what was on the tag: your Name, Rank, and Serial Number.

Draftees also got a complete set of outfits: G. I. clothing (Government Issue) for both winter and summer that they carried around for the duration of the War, first in flimsy olive drab denim bags but later in a sturdy canvas green barrack bag. The Navy used blue. Total weight was about 80 pounds. You had to stencil your name and serial number on the bag. Back packs were also issued to carry normal everyday items whereas the barrack bag contained the other seasonal clothing-winter underwear (long johns), 2 pair of wool pants, 2 wool shirts, wool socks, puttees, canteen, woolen jacket plus and a pair of dress shoes, aside from the combat boots that were worn daily

After one week at Monmouth, I was shipped by train with 800 or more other draftees to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, about 15 miles from the City of Muskogee. It took us three days to get there by a slow troop train. There I was assigned to the 88th Signal Company in the 88th Infantry Division of the 9th Army. All Army camps, of course, by necessity, were huge places holding a Division of the Army, about 11,200 men and 5,000 civilians. It consisted of white barracks, usually 2-3 for each company with a plot of ground of about 50 yds square for company formations, a main parade ground and a Division Headquarters building setup with flag poles in all of the Company Headquarter areas. Camps like Gruber were in the sticks (farm and woodland) away from villages on purchased lands on which the various Army companies camped or used for their maneuvers, hiking, bayonet fields, tank grounds, explosive and demolition areas, and actual ground fire training fields for day and night time training activities. Gruber was a miniature village replete with theaters, churches, PX's (Post Exchanges) where soldiers could buy sundry items not issued like radios, toiletries, food luxuries, gifts, and a lot of other things for use at the base or to send home as souvenirs. I seldom went near the PX's, as I had no wants over and above what the Army issued. Besides, my life was only worth $50 bucks a month and I could not afford to waste it.

While there, I had my share of climbing poles. stringing and repairing electric, telephone, and field telephone wire. The Signal Company kept all the companies in communication with each other. Without telephones and radios, an Army is dead on the lot and helpless. There, we went on a couple of overnight bivouacs in the local woods, long hikes, did a lot of marching (drilling), simulating actual combat with Bayonets, and did many camp setups, and shot off a couple of rifle rounds during the course of our 90 day training period prior to shipment overseas.

We had a Major Bach as a Battalion Head who was a very impressive speaker and a commanding presence (all spit and polish). I always admired glib, forceful speakers. He was straight out of Hollywood Pictures. Unfortunately, years later I learned that he was killed in Africa chasing Rommel with the 88th long after I had left the 88th.

Sometime in August of '42, a bulletin came out from the Army encouraging G.I's to enroll in the Officer Candidate School. I debated this, as I could have become an Officer long before being Drafted, being an All-American Star Football player but did not. Commissions had been offered to me while playing and the Army wanted to encourage National football celebrities to become officers simply because of the advertising and enrollment possibilities that they would get out of such announcements – a sort of hero worship fallout. Most of the football world expected me to become an Officer but I had other plans. Like most hot blooded guys, I tried to avoid the Draft. Becoming an officer might increase my chances of getting shipped overseas to the War quicker and maybe getting killed sooner than if I didn't. I didn't like that. I always felt that the men that declared war (Congress and the President) should be the first to go to war and be the first to die for their beliefs, setting an example for the kids that went to war. I finally succumbed to applying for Officer Candidate School (OCS) and submitted my Officer choices: the Medics was my 1st choice, followed by Engineers, and then the Signal Corps. I met with the Officer Candidate Panel and everything went well until the Army Colonel asked me why I had not applied for the Army Infantry.

I explained my biological, medical, and zoological background and told the Colonel that I would be more valuable to the Army in the Medics than in the Infantry, more or less implying that anyone could become an Infantry Officer (which was true). Of course, I was deemed unfit to become an Officer. That ended that.

Up to that point, no one knew that I had played football and was a former unanimous All-America tackle for 2 years until about the 19th of September 1943 when the 88th Signal Company received orders to ship me to Camp Cooke to play with the West Coast Army All Star Football team, being coached by Major Wallace Wade. Alas! Somebody had found out where I was! However, I figured that it would slow my being shipped overseas, so I did not object.

I traveled from Gruber through Reno, Nevada where I got off the train in an empty rail yard to sight see for a half hour layover but upon coming back to the train, two other trains had pulled in and I had forgotten which track mine was on. I had to go through a parked train on the siding to get to what I thought was mine and prayfully hopped aboard just as it was pulling out. I hoped that I was on the right train as all my duffel was aboard; and, I'd be up the creek if I had not picked the right train. Fortunately, it was the right train and I breathed a sigh of relief. At San Francisco, I had to take a local to Camp Cooke at Lompoc, Ca. The train passed through some of Burpee's Seed country that had flowers still blooming - very colorful. I had played in the East-West Shriner Game in January 1941, so this California trip was my second there. I was not very impressed with California, as I had not seen very many forests or trees—just grassy hills. Very boring country.

I reported in and was assigned to a barracks on the West coast that was filled with 70 or so ex-football players, some of which were All Americans. Most were Officers. There were at least a half dozen that I had played against but many were from Wade's North Carolina, Georgia, and S. Carolina country. Of course, since Wade knew those players (some of which had been on his teams), they got to be on the first and second teams because they knew his plays.. Of the players there, Jarring John Kimbrough of Texas A & M was the most famous. John was a nice guy and I enjoyed my limited contact with him. He had been with me on the NY American Pro Team in 1941 in the newly organized American League in competition with the National Football along with Tom Harmon of Michigan U. at Yankee Stadium in New York City's Bronx area. We played 10 games, ending up losing 2 games and tying one. We played the Cleveland Bullets (??) for the Championship in a game in Yankee stadium that we lost by one touchdown. I played end in that game and dropped a touchdown pass in the end zone in front of a huge crowd of about 3,500 sports fans. Was my face RED? Pro football then was not what it is today. I was the highest paid lineman in both leagues at $3,000.00. I played a full 60 minutes in each game: High School, College, and in the Pros. The two platoon system was not even an idea in someone's head at that time. If you were substituted for during the game, you were out of it for good. There was no return.

Kimbrough was a pile-driving fullback, very conscientious, and fast for a 215 lb man. He was 6' 3 1/2"s or so and a quiet man. Wade on the contrary turned out to be the most uncouth, foul-mouthed Coach I had ever played under. I was sincerely grateful that I had not played under him in college, for he and I would have clashed vehemently had that taken place. I probably would not have made his team no matter how talented I was. I really did not like him. He pretended to be a Man's Man and advocated playing dirty football, something that I could not tolerate. There is no need to play dirty in any game. One could get easily hurt by playing dirty.

Anyhow, we were scheduled to play 5 Professional Football teams: Cardinals, Detroit Lions, Chicago Bears, NY Giants and one other whose name escapes me, maybe the Cleveland Rams. We won 3 out of the 5, ending up in Syracuse, NY losing to the NY Giants. I made the team and just played hard enough to get back to Syracuse to see a farm girl there by name of Georgiana Crise DeShong who had been 14 ½ year old when I worked as a farm hand on her parent's farm in 1938. Unbeknownst to both of us at the time of the game, she was going to be my wife.

After the season, I returned to the 88th Signal Company in Camp Gruber, OK only to find that I was being transferred again but this time to a company of my choice. Prior to leaving for the West Coast Army All Stars, I had read a Directive stating that the Army wanted Cameramen and Film Laboratory

Technicians. Being proficient in both categories I had applied, just on a chance that I could get into a Combat Photo Company. My wish was granted.

I traveled to Camp Crowder, MO and reported to Capt. Knight of the 164th Signal Photo Co. where I was assigned as a Film Laboratory Technician. There I served for about 3 months, mixing chemicals and taking some pictures and in the process gained my Sergeant stripes. I also got involved in Motion Pictures (MP) as a Cameraman as well as a Still Cameraman. We practiced running with MP cameras on tripods, racing 75 feet from one spot to another to see who could set up and level a tripod the fastest. At other times we did MP stories, learning how to keep an audience informed as to what was going one by establishing a Long Shot (LS), Medium Shot (MS), and a Close Up (CU) shot and then repeated the LS to re-orient the audience again as to the locale of the story. There were 4 mile and 10 mile hikes with and without packs, Obstacle Courses, rifle and Carbine shooting, all sorts of lessons, movies on venereal diseases, dress parades, morning calisthenics, and of course, we got up at 6am, had breakfast at 7, and classes or work at 8 am.

All of the men in the 166th were from Hollywood, including the officers but none were famous that I recall. In November '43 we went to Lebanon, TN for War maneuvers where we formed teams of 8, some assigned to do the most damage to the Red Team (our Enemy), and others to photograph the War events. I was the driver of my 4-man Damage and Spy team, driving a Weapons Carrier while the Lt. was in another Carrier with 3 GI's. We had a radio transmitter along to report our position and news as to what we were doing. We drove all night over back roads, infiltrated the Red Lines without detection, found the main Headquarters then cut their main communications cable (contained about 26 wires) and moved on. We bivouacked about 5 am in cover and slept. When I and 3 others awoke, we found that the Lt and his three men had been captured. About noon we heard that our Blue Team had won, cutting the maneuvers down to two days instead of the normal five. Why? Somehow or other, the Red Team's Lines of Communication had been cut by infiltrators and the Generals could not conduct the War without telephones. I can truly say that my team single-handedly won that war despite the fact that the 182d Airborne partook in the exercises in a spectacular whole Company drop. I then hoped that the war overseas could be solved as simply when I got there.

About February 1943, I was selected to be the 1stSgt of a newly formed 166th Signal Photo Company that had 26 Second Lieutenants, all bucking for two lst Lieutenant Positions. What a time! Again, all the men were from Hollywood but this time we had several famous Directors to be. We had the son of a famous Hollywood Film Production Company by name of Goetz, a Director to be, Stanley Kramer, a Lt. Gaither, Russ Meyers (later of Porn Film fame), Ralph Butterfield who published a photo book of the 166th photogs and probably others but I was not up to speed on their reputations. Nor was I really interested in knowing.

However, now that I could afford it on a 1st Sgt salary, I took the plunge. I married my little farm girl Georgiana C. DeShong of Aurora, NY on March 27, 1943, dragging her out of William & Mary at the tender age of 19 in her Junior College year. I was 24 1/2 years old at that point. We set up an apartment in Neosho, MO. I figured we'd have at least another year in the States before I went overseas.

At the 166th, we had a for0mer A & P Manager for a Captain by the name of Downs. He was a vain, swaggering, short, pompous 5' 5" bulldog-faced man with steel-rimmed glasses. I think he had an inferiority complex. Further, I think he was uncomfortable with having to look up at me (6'3") to return my salute in Company formations. We got along quite well, I thought, for 6 months or so until one Friday evening the Company got back from a harrowing live ammo night exercise where the men had to crawl under barbed wire and go through obstacles while live ammo whizzed 18"s over their heads. We got back about midnight, filthy from the mud and dirt of the exercise. Friday also was the usual time when all barracks had to be scrubbed and neatened for Saturday morning's inspection. Feeling sorry for the men, I cancelled the scrubbing unbeknownst to the Captain, thinking that he would understand. I also thought that he'd gain more respect and appreciation from the men for this act of kindness. Not so. The next day the Captain was furious. We spent Saturday morning scrubbing the barracks. He cancelled all weekend passes but he did not berate me for my deed. He just let me stew in his silence. That day was the beginning of my

downfall, as the Captain was a spit and polish guy. He wanted to make soldiers out of the poor contingent of men that he was saddled with. I was not Army enough for him, I think.

We went on maneuvers to Lebanon, Tennessee in late spring 1944; and, despite warnings from the Captain, telling his men to behave on the way down and not to fraternize or whistle at the girls or do any other thing that would reflect on his company – we had trouble. He caught a jeep containing four Motor Pool men whistling and showing off to some girls in a small town enroute to Lebanon, Tennessee. The Motor Pool Sergeant in charge did not get blamed. I did, for not maintaining discipline. When we got to the Lebanon campgrounds, the company bivouacked in Pup tents. In the next morning formation, I was busted to Private and ironically the Motor Pool Sergeant who was to blame for the loss of my stripes was made 1st Sgt. In a grand Hollywood style showing, I was ceremoniously stripped of my 1stSgt stripes (cut off) and was re-assigned as a truck driver. All we lacked was a Hollywood drum roll during the process.

Within a few days I was shipped back to the 164th Signal Photo Company that I had cadre-ed out of only to find out that they were on Alert to go overseas. Fortunately for me I was declared excess baggage. I had to be transferred to some other outfit, as there was no room for me. This was fine with me, as I really did not want to go overseas. (They ended up in the Pacific War, a war that I did not want any part of either).

However, while there with the 164th, I tried to get transferred to Astoria, N. J. into a Combat Motion Picture outfit but I had no luck. They wanted me but anyone in an *Alerted* Company could not be transferred, even if they were excess baggage. I also wrote to a Colonel in Astoria, NY whom I had made friends with while he and his crews were training us as cameraman with the 164th and the 166th but he could not help me for the same reason.

In mid-November 1943, I was transferred to the Headquarters Co., 1142d Combat Engineers Group just about 200 yards across the quadrangle from the 164th Signal Photo Co. in Cp Crowder, MO. The 164th left a few weeks later for a Staging Area.

How the 1142nd Group was formed

I'm ignoring to tell you about the other Companies that I was in because this is the one that I went overseas with. Originally, on 1 Oct 43, the 11th Engr Combat Bn received orders to select a Cadre of one officer and 17 GI's to form the 1142nd Hdqtrs Co. This was done with a Capt. Gerald McGrew as its only officer in Command. On 06 Oct, orders were received to activate the unit at Cp Crowder, MO, with activation to take place on 15 Oct. On that latter date, two Combat Engineer Battalions also were to be attached to the 1142nd - the 253rd under the Command of Lt. Col Nils R. Gustafson and Maj. Henry T. Woyton and the parent 11th Engr Combat Bn under the command of Lt. Col W. L. Rogers. Capt. McGrew was shortly replaced by Maj. Benj. F. Pierce then on 24 Oct he, by Maj. William C. Thornton who lasted until the 27th of October when Lt. Col Frank I. Pethick arrived to permanently take over. The 1142nd was first assigned to XI Corp but later switched on 6 Jan 44 to the XVI Corp of the 2nd Army.

The Company was filled then on 14 Nov 43 with 66 southern men from North Carolina which the NC Selective Service was pleased to send. Processing of these men took 2 days and then on Monday 15 Nov 43 the company's Mobilization Training Program (M.T.P.) was begun. During this period other officers and GI's from various states (including me) came to fill out the Unit to Table of Organizations Strength. By 01 December, the 1142nd had 15 Officers and 91 G.I's. On that date, it was ordered to furnish a cadre to form the 1153rd Engr Combat Group. This cadre went to Camp Rucker, AL, arriving there on 17 Dec 43. On 17 Dec also, the 286th Combat Bn was activated and attached to the 1142nd under the command of Maj. Earl W. Wheeler.

Officers who took part in our training in MO. By 01 Jan 44, we had 16 officers as follows: (AR 345-105, Change 3: Ltr dtd Oct 44)		**Officers who went overseas with us.** Lv'g Cp. Campbell, KY, 20 Aug 44 we had: (Sp Order 207, 14 Aug 44, Cp Campbell, KY)
Gp Cmdr	Lt. Col. Frank I. Pethick, Jr.	Pethick
Gp Executive Off.	Lt. Col Benjamin F. Parrott	Maj. Milton I. Medof (CO, Medics)
Intelligence S2	Maj. Benjamin F/ Pierce	
Operations (S3)	Maj. Wm G. Thornton	Maj. Chas. U. Prout (S-3)**
Operations (S3)	Maj. Peter J. Smykla	
Supply S4	Capt. Chas. W. Carr	Carr (S4)
Chaplain	Capt Kermit G. Canterbury	Canterbury (Protestant Chaplain)
Asst Int. S2	Capt. Wm. H. Evans	
Asst Opns S3	Capt Gerald McGrew	
Gp Dental Off.	Capt Herbert S. Jackson	Jackson
Asst Gp Dental Off.	1st Lt Donald A. Keiser	
Sp. Serv. Off.	1st Lt Joseph C. Milburn	
S1 & CO, Hq Co.	2nd Lt Kenneth T. Keirstead	Capt Keirstead (C0 & Train Cmdr)
Asst S1 & Adj.	2nd Lt Samuel H. Guile	
Asst S1 & Motor Off.	2nd Lt. Paul W. Corbett	Corbett (lst Lt now ?)
Com. Off.	2nd Lt Frank E. O'Connor	1st Lt O'Connor
	2nd Lt. Glen L. Rash	
		1st Lt Myron H. Stock**
? = Rank Unknown		2d Lt. (?) Richard M. Voss**
* Promoted to Major at Myles Standish		*Capt. John F. McWilliams (S2)**
** Atchd at Cp Campbell, Ky.		Capt. Eugene E. Hollander**

By 21 Feb 44, the Hdqtrs Co of the 1142nd completed their M.T. P. Tests and was declared fully War Maneuver functional; and, by Maneuvers time, it had lost Officers Thornton, Smykla, McGrew, Pierce, Keiser, Milburn, Rash, Guile, and Evans sometime. However, when we left Cp Campbell for Cp Miles Standish, MA on 20 Aug 44, we gained 1st Lt. Aloysius B. Schwarz, 1st Lt. Myron H. Stock, 2nd Lt. Richard M. Voss, McWilliams, Prout, and Capt Eugene E. Hollander. Keirstead was now a Captain and O'Connor a 1st Lt. I am not sure if Voss was promoted to 1st Lt in Cp Standish. The functions of Hollander, Stock escape me but Voss was assigned to the Motor Pool.

Now back to my History. For several weeks I don't think any of the officers were aware that I was in the Company. I was not on any of the Rosters. On several occasions I skipped night camping exercises (running through the woods via compass to a designated spot). Finally, after about 6 weeks, they caught up with me. Would you believe it? Unbeknownst to me, I was promoted to PFC on the day of another night exercise. I did not attend the night session; and, the next morning in formation to my surprise, I was busted again to PVT for missing the exercise. Apparently, some Lieutenant wanted me to run a compass through the woods that night and found that I was not there! The CO was pissed off and scolded me, saying that I should know better and that I should set an example for the men. In other words, shape up. Well, I did, realizing that my honeymoon at the company was over.

Shortly after in November 1943 I was assigned to be a Bridge Designer under a Major Peter J. Smykla in S3 Operations. I did not spend much time at the job. I had one meeting with the Major when about that time my wife's parents obtained a two week Hardship Leave for me in January so that I could help with the corn harvest on the farm in Aurora, NY. They even contacted Sen. John Tabor of NY and tried to get me discharged so that I could run their 400 acre farm but that failed. However, prior to this, the Company had a Carbine rifle shoot out to find their best Marksman. To 1st Lt Kenneth T. Keirstead's (the CO) dismay, I won the title. He reluctantly had to congratulate me and give me the $5 Dollar prize. That about broke his heart! This was shortly after he had busted me to PVT from PFC.

When I came back from Hardship Leave, I found that I had been replaced as a Bridge Designer by PVT Harold A. Gardner, a nice quiet older serious guy. There were no explanations given but I was relieved, for the job entailed a lot of math and I did not like the idea at all. Two months later in 1944, I was promoted to Sergeant with the title of Demolitions Expert, still assigned to S3 which was the operating brains of the outfit with Lt. Col Frank I. Pethick, Jr. as the Commander-In-Chief. In this S3 Group with Pethick were Major William G. Thornton, Capt. Charles W. Carr, Major Peter J. Smykla, and a Lieutenant. Of the enlisted men in the S3 Group were Sgt John C. Fox, Sgt Daniel G. Andert, Sgt Harold A. Gardner (Bridge Designer), and myself as the Demolitions Sgt., plus one Private (typist) whose name I cannot recall although I can faintly visualize him in my mind. Pvt William L. Wathen was one of our Jeep Drivers (he later made Sergeant). The duties of the enlisted men entailed mapping, keeping battle lines posted, locations of attached Battalions, where road and bridge work was being done, keeping posted on all Army Regulations and their changes, maintenance and dissemination of all info on new mines and equipment, data on all Companies attached to us (See App. List), help with Liaison Officer contacts and other mundane things. Later during the war, we helped Battalions procure road building material: rubble, gravel, building materials, timbers, road fill, selected the best and safest routes to move equipment, etc when these battalions were assigned to these various tasks as the Allies pushed through war torn areas on the way to Berlin. Despite my fallings out with the Captain, I was often the Acting 1st /Sgt. in a pinch after I had graduated to the T/Sgt grade, both at Cp Crowder and later overseas for some reason. I guess the Captain did not really dislike me but when our old inherited Regular Army 1st/Sgt was left behind in the States, I was not selected to take his place. I think had I not been busted again to Pvt from PFC by the C0, I might have gotten back my stripes. Alas, it was not to be. The Army does not forgive or give second chances.

The 1142d left for War Maneuvers in Lebanon, TN on the 23d Feb 1944 (my 2nd trip there) and arrived on 25 February. From 26 Feb 44 to 24 March we participated in Operations 5, 6, 7, and 8 there (whatever they were), including two crossings of the Cumberland River, one of which was made under difficult flood conditions. At the termination of the maneuvers, when the Maneuver Area was permanently closed, the 1142d was given the mission of rehabilitating the badly rundown Area. For this work, the 81st, 101st, 182d, 244th, 245th, 253d, 276th and 303d Engr Combat Battalions were attached to us on 24 March 44. This rehab work was completed on 31 May 44. It included the repairing or rebuilding of 148 bridges, 1475 miles of road graded and ditched; 507 miles of shoulder bladed, and 452 miles of road graveled. Materials used included 204,760 board feet of lumber, 8245 yards of gravel, 3l,078 yards of crushed rock, 28 tons of sand and 639 sacks of cement. In addition the units dismantled temporary buildings and did some quarry operations and salvaged some material (Ltr in Gov't Archives). We then went directly to Camp Campbell, a pre-preparation overseas stop, in Clarksville, KY on 1 June 44 and stayed until 20 Aug 44, never making it back to Cp. Crowder, MO. During this time we prepared for our overseas trip and supervised the training and prep for overseas movement of two Engineering Combat Battalions, one Treadway ridge Co., one Light Pontoon Co, and one Maintenance Co., as well as initially training three Treadway Bridge Companies.

Here again at Cp Campbell was a call for Direct Officer Commissions, strictly in Medical Units. Again, I submitted an application. I passed muster on this but again, I still could not transfer, as I was with an *Alerted* Outfit. This seemed to be an act of futility. Why did they offer direct commissions in a Staging Area, full of Alerted Companies? I dunno. I was resigned to go overseas with the 1142d as a Demolitions T/Sgt.

Here at Campbell, our Officer List got a major shuffle. Maj. Charles U. Prout took over S-3, Maj. John F. McWilliams took over S-2, 1st Lt. Aloysius B. Schwarz (Catholic Chaplin), who later served as our interpreter in Germany and helped pacify the locals was added, along with 1st Lt Myron H. Stock and 1st Lt. Richard M, Voss who went to the Motor Pool.

On 20 Aug, we left Campbell at 0200 via train to go to the Camp Myles Standish Staging Area near Boston, MA, arriving at 1600 pm. Here we got additional shots, upgraded our clothing, had Sex Disease movie viewings, more or less loafed for eight days, and got squared away as to the Battalions that were to be attached to protect us on our journey overseas.

We then left Standish, embarking for Boston at 0900 hours on 29 Aug 1944, boarding the Ship Transport Mariposa at 1045 hours. We sailed the next day at 0700 hrs on the tide on 30 Aug 44 for an unknown port of destination. Pethick was the Troop Ship Commander and *I was designated as the lst Sgt of the ship over 800+ GI's.*. Why, I don't know but I took the place of our 1st Sgt who normally would have been in charge. Thereupon, I was locked in the *No Smoking* Command Room with Col. Pethick and 40-50 other Battalion officers, all smoking Dutch Master Cigars that they had just purchased from the Ship's PX or whatever they called it in the Navy. I also got seasick but soon recovered to assume My Command of the big boat load of enlisted men. I should have bought a Swagger Stick from the PX like Gen. Patten. After assigning KP and a few other mundane duties, there was not much for me or the men to do except, gamble, play cards, throw up, read, go to the movies, throw up, write home, chew the fat, exchange redneck jokes, and take lukewarm salt water showers or scan the seas for birds that I didn't know. These were few and far between after we got out on open seas. I had an easy time of commanding my 800+ troops, as nothing seriously took place among the men – no knifings, fights, etc.

After sailing for 8 days this way and then that –a - way to avoid Uboats, we arrived at Liverpool, England at 1700hrs on 06 Sept '44. When that happened, I lost my Command and reverted back to being one of the G.I's in the Company.

We got off the Mariposa by 22:05 hrs and left by train for Bournemouth, Eng., arriving there by 0800 hours the next morning (a 10 hour trip) on 07 Sept 44. There we spent nearly two weeks in the venerable South Cliffe Hotel on the beach (see Addenda photos). Here the men got passes to visit the environs and London. T/Sgt Fox had relatives in London, so he went for a visit. I did not do much. Didn't get time to go to the beach, as I was constantly on duty with S-3 but I am glad to say the rest of the boys made hay with the girls, the English WRENS, and gadded the beaches while they were there. I did get a pass to London with Fox. Got the usual photos of the Palace, the guards, Westminster Abbey, etc.

While at Bournemouth, we had to finish refurbishing and get all of our pigeons in line: trucks, jeeps, Weapons Carriers, trailers, Staff cars, water purification equipment, command tents, pens and pencils, paper (can't run an Army without paper and pencils), maps of Europe and a million other small important things like medical supplies. We left Bournemouth via convoy at 0800 on 22 Sept 44 for a British Camp, arriving about 1230 pm near Weymouth, Eng.. Here we stayed for two days and left at 0845 on the 24th, leaving for the Port of Weymouth, Eng., arriving there at 1030. We then boarded an LST and were on our way to France, crossing the English Channel in smooth weather without thrills or problems. I kept on the lookout for strafing German airplanes but none came.

We landed at Omaha Beach in Cherbourg, Normandy, France at 2100 on 26 Sept 44. Fortunately, we were not greeted by shell fire or bullets. We had missed D-Day's landings there on 06 June where it was said that about 5,000 ships dropped off troops, many of which never made land or came home. Carnage from the battle lay all about us, a grim reminder of things that might await us. It was a sobering sight; and many of the boys said a few prayers and thanked the boys that had sacrificed their lives in preparation for our arrival. Sunken vessels, destroyed vehicles of the Allies and the Germans littered the beaches and roads. Buildings were ruined, German bunkers were in rubble. Craters were everywhere. No one liked the looks of the place. There were no civilian cars, only bicycles and carts, some horse drawn. People lined the roads to cheer us on or to swear at us but most, apparently wanted to thank us for arriving. Who knows why they were there? Undoubtedly, some were German spies reporting on our arrival.

From Normandy, we proceeded to St. Pieux, France where we bivouacked at 2300 in the dead of night on the 26th Sept '44 in a field surrounded by hedgerows where we cussed and muttered as we pitched our pup tents in the dark and dug drainage ditches and fox holes along side, just in case. In the morning, there were French people running around our tents offering to trade bread, wine, eggs or fruit or something for cigarettes, chocolate bars, toilet paper, coffee, soap, cameras, small can openers from K and C-rations, sugar, salt, and pepper packets. The people were dressed much like old Rembrandt paintings: in loose jackets, baggy pants, sturdy shoes, canes, shawls, and wooden shoes (sabots). There were many young boys (no girls). The old men smoked pipes or puffed cigarettes made of ersatzes tobacco. Here, I fell in love with Europe's brown or black bread. It was the tastiest stuff that I had ever eaten, even today. It was the closest thing to Pumpernickel but was not. It had its own inimitable flavor. Whenever possible, as we

moved through France or were stationed near towns, the Boulangeri (Bakery) was the first place that I visited, to trade something for a loaf of bread. Butter enhanced its flavor tremendously.

Here at St. Pieux we were assigned to the 1st Army. In England we had been attached to the 9th Army, staging under the 111 Corps aegis. Our code word was 'AMPERE'. We stayed here two days until 28 Sept. Many of the boys visited Cherbourg to get photos of the carnage left in the wake of the invasion battle that took 20 days. The Hedgerow countryside in the Normandy Region (Township?) about Cherbourg and St. Laurent gave our invading troops and tanks a lot of trouble, for the fields, most not over 8 acres, were bounded on 4 sides by tough centuries old hedgerows, replete with field stones, stumps, and live trees. German resistance was heavy because of this. Not only was it difficult for tanks to go through them, but one could not anticipate what was lurking beyond the next hedgerow. As the tanks reared their way over each hedgerow, their undersides were uplifted and exposed to bazookas, artillery, and grenades. Many tanks were lost here; and, I could see first hand the truth of what I had read of this battle before coming here

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Delbert Reason (one of 1142nd) wrote that, "It was said that an American Sergeant solved the problem by suggesting that long pieces of steel be welded to the low fronts of the tanks. These long prongs went through the hedgerows, held the weight of the rubble and uplifted trees on them, and thus the weight kept the bellies of the tanks down", allowing the tanks to open a roadway through.

The 1142d left St. Pieux at 0815 on 28 Sept 44 and traveled only 50 miles before bivouacking again at Les Laurent, France in a farmyard surrounded by hedgerows again at 1150 am on the 28th. We stayed there until 06 Oct. completing our staging accouterments (getting Battalions attached, etc). We then left on a steady 4 day bivouacking and fox hole digging trip of 350 miles across France to Kinroy, Belgium. We arrived at 1800 on the 9th of October near the Maas R and the Front Lines. Prior to this on the 8th, we had been attached to the First Army and the XIX Corps. We could hear the machine gun, rifle fire, and artillery shelling and wondered what was in store for us. The night sky was lit up by tracers and artillery bursts, followed by the rumble of the shells hitting the ground or buildings or bursting in air in search of an airplane. This rumbled all through the night. In the morning, I learned that the siege of Aachen was on in Germany.

On the 10th, we moved to Aelbeck, Holland to get closer. On the 13th Oct 44, the 1142d became operative when we attached the 208th Engr Combat Battalion and the 990 Engr Treadway Bridge Co. At this time, we assumed the maintenance of the supply routes of the XlX Corps in their siege of the Siegfried Line and Aachen, Germany. On the 15th, we were relieved of this duty but continued support of the XlX Corps and on 22 Oct we became fodder for the German Army and performed road and bridge maintenance for the XlX under the lst Army. It was here that I first realized that we were vulnerable. Ahead of us, infantry were taking hits in slow house to house fighting as the battle for Aachen took 10 days or so and they headed for the Roer River, our first natural barrier that had to be bridged. I knew this would be heavily fortified as would be the Rhine, a short distance behind that. There, indeed, I knew the troops would meet with major resistant as we were in charge of building the bridges that would enable the Infantry and the tank outfits to cross the Rhine. A lot of men would die there; and, our fate was limbo and a source of wonder. Once over the Rhine, the rest of the trip to Berlin would be a piece of cake, as Germany had not expected to be invaded and conquered; and, it had not fortified any of the town or strategic places beyond the Rhine.

Indeed, they had not expected the Allies to even to be able to land on the continent in the first place. After all, they touted themselves as the Super Race. Had not all of Europe fallen before their Armies? England was on their schedule once they finished conquering Russia but they had bogged down in Russia? Things were not going so well there. The resistance was more than anticipated and Hitler had not planned too well on supplies. Gasoline for the tanks and vehicles was short as was ammo and food. Then too, Hitler had started his invasion of Russia too close to winter. Operating on three fronts – Southern Europe, Northern Europe and the Russian Fronts took their toll – not only of men but of supplies and equipment. Factories could not supply Hitler's needs as the Allies had destroyed most of them by aerial bombings.

Here, I learned how the Engineer Groups operated. There were at least 3-4 attached to a Corps which had responsibility for guarding and advancing on a broad 300 or more mile front. The Corps rotated the Groups and these Groups leap frogged one another, e.g: when a Group like ours was done repairing roads and bridges in the rear, it moved to the front, relieving a Group there to recuperate and to take over our maintenance in the rear. As we were a fresh Group, we had hot-footing to the front to relieve the operating Group there, inheriting their Battalions and assigned work loads.

During our one night sleep over in Kinroy, we had posted four concealed perimeter guards throughout the night. Harold Gardner served a Sergeant of the Guard for the first half of the night. He said, "I continuously made the rounds of each guard and of course was challenged by each guard. Generally, the first thing I would know I was close to a guard's position was when I could hear the click of the safety on their rifles or grease guns. I was always hoping that I would hear the challenge and that the guard would hear my answer."

"Sgt. Nicholas Drahos had the last half of the night shift and a sentry who was being relieved from duty fired a shot into the air. Drahos took the rifle away from him but the sentry could not see why Drahos did this, claiming he was just emptying the chamber of the rifle and that the weapon was empty. The sentry failed to notice that the bolt had chambered another round. I had crawled up to that sentry several times during the night." Gardner added.

Fortunately, we left the area at 0615 on the 10th Oct for Aelbeck, Holland. A week later we heard that we had missed being captured when Kinroy had been overrun by the Germans again. At Aelbeck, the 1142d celebrated its 1st birthday on Oct 15, '44 by opening a keg of beer on the occasion. We had fresh eggs for a change the next morning garnered by trading coffee and cigarettes with the Dutch for them. We had a helleva time sleeping during the next two days because of torrential rains. Our Fox holes were generally a quagmire. Thanks to my civilian camping experiences, I had picked slightly higher ground, pitching our tent over our Fox Hole. I then guttered the tent well so that the water from it and the neighboring ground would flow away from our fox hole. So, Sgt. Fox, my tent buddy, and I slept quite comfortably (head to toe) in our narrow 3.5' wide Fox Hole while those that didn't sleep in vehicles didn't get much sleep at all. Much of their clothing got wet while ours remained dry.

We stayed at Aelbeck until 21 Oct and at 1430 left for New Einde, Holland and holed up in a school but only stayed there until 25 Oct when we left at 0815 for Sichen, Belgium where we stayed at a theater, sleeping on a cement floor. By this time I had made a mattress of wheat straw and other things and I slept comfortably and warmly on dirt or cement floors. Once we hit New Einde and Sichen, we never slept in fox holes again – only on floors. Eventually, I got a thick sleeping bag from a wounded soldier who was scheduled to go home, complete with a sewn in wool Army blanket with a fresh dusting of 10% DDT to keep the cooties away.. Our own GI sleeping bag was an un-insulated coffin-shaped woolen sack with a thin nylon outer shell bag into which it fitted. It was supposed to take the place of 2 blankets but it was hardly worth one. We all scrounged the Replacement Clothing Depots where wounded or dead men's equipment was deposited. We picked through them for anything that would add to our own creature comforts: more blankets, shoes, goulashes, gloves, socks, scarves, sweaters, etc. Dead men didn't need them any more.

Sichen was an area where we first experienced Buzz bombs other than in London, England. These were timed German robot mechanized flying bombs, steered by compass and geared to travel an X number of miles before the motor automatically shut down over the presumed target distance such as a city like London, Liege, factory, etc. They were frequently passing over on the way to Liege, Belgium and Maastricht, Holland. On our 2nd day there, one cut its motor short of our Sichen School. I was outside and ran into the basement.

There was a mass rush to get under cover – behind the nearby brick wall or in the school – anywhere but outside where flying shrapnel from the bomb could kill or maim. This particular bomb landed about 100 yards from us in a sugar beet field. The impact cut a crater about 40 feet x 10 feet deep No one was killed but Pvt William A. Pace was seriously cut by flying school glass. He was evacuated to a Field Hospital. We never saw him again until we got back to the States. He got a Purple Heart out of it

and 5 points toward a discharge but these were not worth the life time injuries suffered. Several guys jumped into the open garbage pit; and, after this experience another pit was dug but no garbage was allowed in it.

I don't remember too much about Sichen. There were caves there where the locals were said to grow mushrooms but I could never get out of S3 to go visiting the towns or beer halls that were on our way, at least in the daylight hours.. However, most of the company did get out and visited them. So, I missed a lot of the cultural opportunities available in these small towns, especially inland towns where most of the populations never experienced the horrors of war. It must be remembered that Germany never expected to be invaded or to see their armies retreat. Their armies had had easy conquests of most of Europe and it never dawned on them that they'd lose this war. Hitler seemed invincible and they were well indoctrinated by his propaganda machine so as to believe that their armies were invincible.

Delbert C. Reason (one of our men) wrote," There was not much entertainment at Sichen but the fellows walked to the village where there was a dance hall and where they could meet the Belgium girls. Willy, a today Belgium e-mailer from Sichen (a kid of 10 at the time when we were there), wrote that he remembers the name of Eller, who played the trumpet and another guy whose name he didn't remember. Bernie Wicker of the 1142d told me, "It was probably James E. Johnson. Sgt. Eller could really out play Johnson, but Johnson was good." Willy now runs the bar parlor that his father ran at the time we were in Sichen and has supplied some of the color pictures herein.

When we first got to Sichen, somebody discovered a cache of several German P-38 pistols. I never got the chance to get one but the prize pistol everyone looked for was the .44 cal Lugar, the best pistol of the German Army. I remember sweeping part of a Sichen field for mines and found a cache of silverware and a bottle of wine. I took the wine (it was spoiled) and left the silverware for the Belgium lady who must have buried it. Everywhere we went kids appeared out of nowhere looking for handouts of candy, chocolate and anything that was edible or usable. It was common to see them and even elders going through our garbage cans, taking home what they could eat of discarded uneaten food or tin cans that would prove useful.

On 15 Nov 44 at 0800 we traveled to Heer, Holland which was within 10 miles so of Maastricht, Holland, still attached to the XlX Corps and the 1st Army. Maastricht was the first Holland city liberated by the Allies and it was heavily damaged. Here we stayed in our first castle (Heer Hall), complete with a moat and a draw bridge. It happened to be once the Southern Palace of the Queen of Holland. It was very ornate and its walls were lined with huge 10' x 10' paintings. Maastricht was also on the Buzz Bomb path to Liege and many fell on the hill at the edge of the city but another one quit over our chow line one evening and several guys got cut on barbed wire fencing that was nearby. I went to town once, Xmas shopping for a present for my wife who went back to William and Mary College in Virginia to finish her degree. I found an unusually colored commemorative tea set that was the first pottery made in the local factory since the German occupation. This along with a set of 6 cordial crystal glasses bearing an etched sheaf of wheat were sent to Virginia as Xmas presents. We still have 5 cups and 6 saucers of the tea set and about 4 cordials that we had not broken. Georgiana wrote back that her roommate had broken one of the glasses upon arrival. She was so intrigued by the fact that they emitted a nice ringing noise when tapped. She tapped once too often and it shattered in her hand.

At Heer, T/Sgt John Fox and I got passes to Liege for one day. There we visited the museums, shops, and restaurants and took a few photos. It was an impressive city, as were most European cities, very ornate architecture and reeking in quaintness in some respects. You could sense that these cities were always meant to be under heavy rule and pomp.

This was the rain and flood season; and, as we became inactive as an Army, I spent a week in Eindhoven, Holland at a British Bomb Rescue School tramping through bombed houses, learning the techniques of rescuing people from bombed out structures, using dogs and the latest sensing gadgets. I either stayed with a Dutch family or ate a few meals with them but I don't remember which. They were in their late 30's and had a boy of about 10 – very nice people. (The Army supplied the food).

GERMANY

However, in the middle of November, XIX Corps attacked to gain control of the land to the Roer River. We had to get over the Roer in order to cross the Rhine which was our next big obstacle other than the Elbe that was some 200 miles inland, just West of Berlin. With the onset of the rainy-snow season, the Germans had had time to dig in. On our S3 map Sgt Fox and I had plotted the positions of the troops on line. The 2nd Armored and the 29th Infantry were there along with the 30th Infantry Division in the South on the right flank. So fierce was the battle that the Germans committed most of their tanks and the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadiers who were nearby. Our 2nd Armored and the Corps Artillery and Tank Destroyers knocked out 118 of their tanks. The 29th Infantry attacked the Germans in the center and soon the Germans gave way. While this was going on, the 3rd German Panzer Grenadier and the 116th Panzer Division tried to break through the 30th Infantry Division but were repulsed. Meanwhile the 29th had pushed through the center and headed for Julich on the Roer. By the 28th of November all three divisions were at the Roer, and the plans for crossing were begun. This is where the 1142nd came in with our attached battalions and various bridge building components. We had to build the bridges across the Roer, for the Germans had destroyed the existing ones including a railroad trestle.

The various units had to race to the Roer River dams to prevent the Germans from blowing them up, which would create a half mile of flooded lands. They succeeded in getting control of the Erftalsperre Dam but not the dirt spillway of the Schwammenaual Dam. This was destroyed and the waters flooded the lowlands, stopping the Allied Advance for two weeks. We did not get across the Roer until 23 February 45, but I digress.

On the 18th Dec, the 1503rd Engineer Water Supply Co was attached to us. While we were at Heer, we were alerted to the fact that an unknown number of Germans, dressed as GI's, had parachuted to the rear of the front and were trying to sabotage our equipment. Everyone was on the alert but most were caught because they could not answer questions like "Who won the World Series in 19??" "Who is Kilroy?" and other simple well known questions that most G.I's knew. Our radio tent was some distance from Heer Hall and had to be taken down and its 3 men had to be moved into the castle during this scare.

Here's a tale Bill Stephenson, our Company Clerk, told me. "At Heer, I was stationed on guard within 50 feet of the RR track that ran by our bivouac area. Lt. Voss was the Officer of the Guard the night I pulled guard. I saw a man walking down the RR which was elevated from the surrounding ground, and my vision of him was clear against the night sky. Standing behind a tree with my carbine trained on the man walking down the track, he failed to answer my first "Halt" order. I pulled off the safety and had my finger on the trigger, and prepared to fire at a second failure for him to heed another halt order. You recall we had received message from Corps to be on the lookout for German parachutists disguised in American uniforms dropping behind the line. Everyone was alert to this: to wit, I'm sure I would have fired after the second Halt and failure to stop. Of course, he did stop. It was Lt. Voss. I was relieved, and I never told him of course, how close he came to being shot."

On the 22nd Dec, the 1142nd received a new area of responsibility and we moved on the 24th to Laurensberg, one mile inside Germany near Aachen. Delbert Reason said, "In a surprise move on Christmas Eve 24 Dec 1944, we pulled up stakes and moved to Laurensberg, Germany, within 1 mile of Aachen. We had thought that we'd spend Xmas in Heer but that was not to be."

Actually, the move was in response to the Battle of the Bulge attack that started on 16 Dec 44. We were ordered forward to Laurensberg near Aachen, as part of the XlX Corps Defense Plan should the Germans come our way. On that wintry 16th of December, three German Armies pushed their way through the hilly heavily forested Ardennes region of southeastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg. Hurtgen Forest was part of the Ardennes. Hitler's objective was to capture the seaport of Antwerp, Belgium, thus separating our Northeastern from the Southern Armies and trapping the 1st, 9th and two British Armies in Germany (Us!). If successful, it would give him time to regroup and force a better negotiated peace. The Ardennes was the weakest and least militarily defended area at the front.

At Laurensberg, we ousted a family from their home and had heat and running hot water. This move put us about a mile inside the Germany's supposedly impenetrable Siegfried Defense line which easily fell to the Allied Armies. There I blew a Bunker that others ahead of us failed to blow. It was about 10' x 10' with narrow-slit window ports overlooking the terrain below.

We had a nice Xmas with a turkey dinner with all the trimmings including yams, cranberries, raisin bread, candy, pie, ice cream, orange juice and coffee. There was a nice German library in the Doctor's house we were in and I enjoyed looking through it even though I knew little German. We had a snowfall on Xmas eve and things changed a bit. We had to place guards on the beat around the area – something we seldom did before in Belgium or Holland. The day before, I had narrowly escaped being strafed on a RR track by a lone Germany miniature airplane, piloted by some kid. As the low plane swept past me, I rolled off the RR embankment into bordering weeds, brush and snow. On his second pass, the pilot could not find me and moved on. Germany had run out of pilots and large planes by this time and had only a few small miniatures left that were being piloted by small teenagers.

Aachen was in shambles, almost totally ruined, with not a house undamaged. It had been taken sometime after October 9th after a period of about 10 days of intense shelling and bombing, when we initially came to Kinroy, Belgium. If you remember, I had said that when we arrived at Kinroy, we were within a few miles of the front. Well, that was the battle for Aachen and it was under siege.

One day, as I jeeped through Aachen (with a driver) on some duty, I saw a round 9 inch metal disk in a rubble pile. It did not look like tin so we stopped and I picked it up. At first, I thought it was made of lead because it was so heavy and dull. It turned out to be pewter, so I kept it and eventually sent it home.

Col. Pethick's Hand Written Report (1142d Comb. Gp, (App'd Web Ref. Mat'l) January 1945 stated: "**As the New Year began, there was considerable snow and cold. The German break-through in the Ardennes and the increased local activity of the Luftwaffe made all alert to the possibility of a German thrust against Aachen. The 308th and the 278th Engr Combat Battalions of the Group maintained Road Blocks and central points as part of the general defense plan. The 172d Combat Battalion returned to the Group on the 19th and the 3 Battalions were placed on a 6 hour alert status as part of the XlX Corps Reserve. The group as a whole was familiarized with its part in the Corps Defense Plan and Ground Maintenance was made of assigned positions. The expected thrust against Aachen, however, never materialized."**

"During the month, the Group continued to operate in its assigned area in routine maintenance tasks; and expanded it's sawmill operations using German mills and civilian labor. Piling for a complete bridge across the Maas River at Roer and Holland was cut; and 70 foot piling was begun to be cut and hauled for a proposed bridge across the Rhine River."

"Toward the end of the month, the temperature, which had been freezing for some time, began to rise and a new problem began to rise with regard to roads. At this time, due to operational requirements there was considerable traffic on the road net. This was due to a shift of the boundary in the north between the British and American zones; and, to the influx of new units in the build-up for the Roer crossing (Note: plus the Bulge Battle). This overloaded the existing road net at a time when it was weakened by the thaw. The resulting road failures were appalling in extent and severity. This applied to many of the main routes as well as secondary roads. It was a time of 'round the clock work and sweat for Engineers."

As an added note to Col. Pethick above, Hitler gambled against his Generals advice, including Gen'l von Rundstedt who was in Command, who said it would fail. We doubled our guards but we were not in immediate danger, as we were located on the northeastern fringe of "The Bulge". Nearby Malmedy, Belgium was overrun and 84 GI's were massacred. At first the German drive caught thd Allies off guard and they quickly penetrated deeply in our lines. They introduced a new killing wrinkle in warfare by appearing in camouflaged white mountain troop uniforms that made them hard to see and . This caused a thorough stripping of local villages of their white bedding to camouflage our troops. The coldest and the

snowiest time of the year fortunately occurred during this time to hamper the push. On 19 Dec, Col. Sherburne, the Division Artillery Commander of the 101 Airborne drove and marched to Bastogna to re-enforce his Commander, General McAuliffe of the 101st and his beleaguered troops, only to be surrounded by Germans, snow, and fog himself. The G.I's were stuck and Bastogna was surrounded. When asked to surrender, McAuliffe wrote "Nuts" on the note and sent it back to the Germans. Puzzled by the word, the Germans finally interpreted it to mean "Go to Hell".

Hitler would have succeeded but for the weather and the strong resistance of the American troops in the sector plus the fact that neither his nor the Allied tanks were of much use in contiguous wooded areas. They could only travel on the limited interior wooded roads. Hitler's blitzkrieg tactic of crushing his enemy with tanks first, followed by troops could not work in the forests. Both sides nearly ran out of ammo and many tanks ran out of gas. Patton tried to get there from the South with his 3rd Army to help them but ran out of gas for his tanks, too, I think. The Allies were stymied. The Air Force could not help because of the clouds and snow that blanketed the whole area for a week or so. It was a time of alertness and everyone was trigger happy and nervous, particularly because of the German spies that had parachuted behind our lines.

On top of the falling snow, temperatures dropped and then a temperature inversion caused an intense low ground fog to develop that hampered both sides. The fog and snow continued until the morning of Saturday, December 23rd that dawned clear, and brought forth the Air Force to the rescue. C-47's parachuted in 1446 bundles of ammunition and food to Bastogna and several C-47's were shot down. Overall, the Allies barely outlasted the Germans. When the fog lifted, our Armies moved, the Air Force bombed, Bastogna was saved and the Bulge was the last real battle in Europe other than on the Russian side of Berlin. However, the Bulge battle did not end until 25 Jan 45. I make it sound simple but there were other factors plus luck that saved us from defeat at Bastogna. Basically, it was the cold, snow, and fog that saved us and defeated the Germans. You'll have to read the history of the Battle of the Bulge to get the gory details. Bastogna was weakly attacked several times but there was no concerted battle for it. The troops eventually just sat there until the weather and the skies cleared...neither side moving much, as I understand it. One letter on the Web said pretty much the same.

However, there were 81,000 GI's wounded, 23,500 captured, while 19,000 died there. On the German side, they had about 100,000 casualties with 64,000 killed, while the British lost 200 men and had about 1,400 casualties. Each side lost about 800 tanks while the Germans lost well over 1,000 airplanes. Over a million men took part in that battle (ours and theirs, including the 1142nd and our Attached Battalions and Companies). Had Hitler's armies succeeded, the 1142nd would have been stranded and cut off in Germany, as we were in the to-be surrounded area . Had this happened, I would have been either killed, or wounded, or taken prisoner. If a prisoner, I probably would have been required to take out my German citizen papers after Germany had won the war.

Delbert Reason noted, "There was a small Dutch town named Vaals just across the German border within walking distance of Laurensberg where we had located a radio school and a recreation center. It was a pleasure to go back into Holland as often as possible for an evening of entertainment. When we moved from Laurensberg, the radio school closed and its equipment was returned to Corps Radio Center."

I never got to Vaal. Only the Motor pool, the Medics and those below the rank of a Buck Sgt ever got to these entertaining beer providing towns. I remember that almost nightly 5-6 guys would go to the local beer hall and drink 63 glass (steins?) of beer. I often wondered how they did it. They never got back until about 0200 and had duty the next day. They must have slept at their jobs, wherever and whatever they were.

Reason said, "We made three shorts moves while at Laurensberg. On Jan 29, 1945, we moved from the several houses that we had been using into one building known as *Schlop Rahe* that housed the whole company. Here, there was plenty of room and all our equipment could be driven under cover inside a closed courtyard. The building had a chapel, bowling alley and running water and steam heat. (I vaguely remember the bowling alley but never bowled. There I slept on a concrete floor.) After we did

considerable work cleaning up the place, Corps Headquarters decided they wanted to use it and so on Feb. 7th we moved into another group of houses nearby which were not near as handy but the houses had running water and steam heat but no mess halls. We had to eat outside."

Col. Pethick wrote for February: "The struggle to maintain the roads continued during the month of February. From the 3rd to the 8th, the 1142nd Engr Combat Group was operating in an area that extended roughly from Eupan, Belgium on the south to Maeseyck, Belgium in the north and from Maastricht, Holland on the west to Aachen, Germany on the east. During this week, the following units were attached: 172nd, 208th, 278th, and 336th Combat Battalions, 554th Hvy Pontoon Battalion, 625th and 630th Light Equipment Companies, 1355th and 1451s Dump Truck Companies and the 1503rd Water Supply Company. This was the largest number of attachments experienced by the Group." He did not state that these were to be used in building pontoon and other bridges across the Roer River.

"In addition to road and bridge maintenance in its assigned area, the Group received numerous assignments from 9th Army Engineer during the month. The most interesting of these was the removal of a Bailey bridge across the Albert Canal near Maastricht, Holland. The bridge was approximately 80 feet above the canal in a deep cut."

Fifteen miles south of us, the 1104th Combat Engineer Group struggled with bridges in the fast current of the Roer caused by the blown Schwammenauel Dam to get the 29th Infantry across. "Anchors did not hold well in the fast current and one was shot away times. They also had to change the bridge's location once. Further south, the 1115th Combat Engineer Gp put the 30th Infantry across. There they had to use alligators to get the first assault across more than 1000 yards of flooded land on each side of the river. At the site, the washed-out roads had to be rebuilt for 1500 yards on each side. The Chemical Warfare Section had the Smoke Generators working and they put down a perfect screen. The enemy artillery landed 1000 yards downstream from the bridge site ". (COPYRIGHT © ARNO LASOE, 2005).

Pethick continues: "On 28 February, the Group was assigned the task of salvaging and repairing floating equipment along the Roer River left after the crossing of XlX Corps on 23 February; and of maintaining the floating bridges across the Roer in the vicinity of Julich, Germany. These were maintained until a Pile Bridge was completed at Julich by the 208th Combat Engineer Battalion on 6 March 1945. This bridge was 350 feet long and had a 50ft fill on the East bank. Night work was done under flood lights which were turned off on the approach of hostile planes – warning being given by the AAA Radar Station nearby." (This one was designed by our 1142nd Sgt Gardner).

During our stay at Laurensberg, The Army offered Battlefield Commissions to GI's who were recommended by their CO. Two of our men Applied. They were old Army guys: M/Sgt William Prescott who was commissioned on 12 Feb 45 as was M/Sgt Temple L. Eller on 23 Feb 45." Major Prout of S3 said he'd recommend me if I wanted a Commission and I told him no. I said, "The war is nearly over and if I go for a Commission I might have to stay in Germany as an Occupation Officer for another year or face the possibility of going to the Pacific War Theater should they call up newly Commissioned Officers and ship them there." I also told him that, "I was married and I wanted to get back to the states to resume my career as a Wildlife Biologist." I think he was disappointed. About that time Lt. Colonel Pethick, Jr. got his full chicken Colonel bars, too.

I believe Sgt Gardner got a commission too later but I don't know when. He actually went back to Bournemouth, England on furlough to look up a girl he dated there in the short time that we were there. He finally ended up marrying her. Perhaps that was why he went for a commission…a big jump in pay and they could stay in Europe for a while longer!

We left Laurensberg on 02 Mar 45 to go to Hongen, Germany which was two miles from the Roer (Ruhr) River that was near Julich and Orsoy. Reason states, "He did not remember much about Hongen except that it was badly damaged and that Headquarters Co occupied a beer parlor and that our mess hall was in a school. I don't remember staying in a beer parlor at all but I took Kodachrome pictures of Hongen

and Julich as we drove through them on the way to Julich, Ger. on the Roer River. Julich was totally demolished. A lot of Germans and GI's died there.

I remember the shelling near Julich while at Hongen about 2 miles away. At night I watched the night skies light up like the last July 4rh salvo as the artillery shells rumbled in the short distance. The only difference was that the salvos seemed never to end. Tracer shells spidered the sky nightly as airplanes came over and dropped parachute flares to light up the area with their eerie bright greenish light, growing dimmer as the flares sputtered out. The ack-acks really let loose at this time. I felt sorry for the poor guys that had to fight and build the bridges at night at the same time, for it was bad enough to do this in the daytime. The Roer was crossed by the XIX Corps on 23 Feb 44 after about a 10 day battle. The Germans had blown up the Schwammenauel Dam Spillway, flooding the area. So, we had to build long bridges. The Groups in the Corps (like us) had been responsible for building 15 bridges across the Roer. The flooding slowed the Allied Drive to Berlin and enabled the Germans more time to retreat inland, blowing up the bridges across the Rhine as they went. During this battle, it was said that the Corps had taken about 11,000 prisoners in the 353 villages and 300 sq miles that the area encompassed.

We crossed the Roer after 11 days at Julich-Hongen-Orsoy on March 11 and headed for Wickrath, Germany, a village about one mile south of Munchen-Gladbach that had been taken by the 29 Infantry Division. There and along the way, many white towels and other white clothes were hanging out windows or on flag staffs, signifying surrender in many houses and this became more common as we made our way to Berlin.

Nothing notable happened at Wickrath. We stayed until 20 Mar 45. I got a pass to a ballet in Munchen-Gladbach that I thoroughly enjoyed. After the ballet, on the way out of the theater, I ran into 1st Lt. Hal McCullough in the Lobby who had been the Quarterback of my team at Cornell U. He was with some outfit in Special Services in the Athletic Department. We had a 10 minute reunion and then we both went our separate ways. Didn't even have time for a beer! Come to think of it, I never had a beer in Europe!

We continued to supply engineering aid and road and bridge repair crews to the Corps and on 20 Mar '45 we again moved and motored to Kempen, Ger.

Col. Pethick wrote for March: "During the first part of March, preparations were being made for the construction of a Class 40 Floating Bailey bridge across the Rhine River near Rheinberg, Germany. Reconnaissance of the site was made as soon as the near shore had been cleared and on the night of the 21st the near shore was reconnoitered in detail. Capt. Richard G. Colton accompanied an Infantry Patrol across the Rhine. This patrol was driven off by enemy small arms fire. A site for a bridge dump was located near Serelen, Germany and equipment was moved up and camouflaged."

"For the Rhine crossing, the Group was given the mission of constructing a floating Bailey Bridge and the erection of anti-debris, anti-mine, anti-personnel and anti-submarine booms upon Army Order. It was also to be prepared to relieve the XVl Corps of its responsibility for all river crossings means at an early date after "D' day."

"On 23 March, the Group's advanced CP opened at Rheinberg, Ger. near the site selected for the Bailey bridge. On 24 March, soon after the assault waves had passed, surveys and preparations were started at the site. (I had to sweep both sides of the Rhine for mines and found none). On 26 March, the construction of the Bailey was begun. This bridge was 1386 feet long with 500 yards of new approach road construction. German aircraft made several attempts to attack the bridge but were driven off."

"On 27 March, maintenance and protection of the 2 Treadway Bridges and of the booms and ferries installed by XVl Corps, was assumed. On 30 March, construction was started on a reinforced Heavy Pontoon Bridge at Orsoy, Ger. This Group also had attached to it at this time, Detachment "C" of the 329th Harbor Craft Company; LCXVP Unit #3, and Naval Party 1806 of the

Royal Navy. By the end of March the Group was responsible for the operation of all Sea Mules, LCM's, and LCVP's in the 9th Army Sector of the Rhine River. The Bailey at Wallach was removed and rebuilt at Orsoy by the 208th Engr. C. Bn. "

However, Kempen was a short stay, for 3 days later on 23 Mar we left and headed for Rheinberg, Ger. on the edge of Essen near the Krupp Manufacturing complex (Ammo, etc) and the Rhine River. The damage to the small villages was now much less than before, as the German Army was in full retreat. There were no pitched battles or artillery fire or air bombings. Larger numbers of civilians now were moving and carrying their few belongings through to points unknown, whereas, in the past fighting zones, there were almost no civilians. The civilians and displaced persons had retreated inland along with the soldiers, abandoning their towns, fearful that the barbaric gangster Americans would torture them. As the Allies passed through the towns, many of the civilians returned to their homes, destroyed or not.

Rheinberg had some damage, as it was near Essen and the Rhine with Kohn (Cologne) down and across the river about 35 miles away. We occupied several houses there with the Mess hall being in a beer parlor, while some close by houses held most of the men. There was a theater there too but I don't remember seeing any movies there. A Pickle Factory was said to be nearby but it was non-operative. Very disappointing, as I dearly loved pickles. However, I was fortunate enough to get a picture of its rubbish pile after some outfit had cleaned it out for quarters. It was said that the factory also held a lot of wooden shoes that were worn by its workers. I imagine the souvenir hounds made short work of them.

We were always on the main drag - the Red Ball Highway - to Berlin, as the truckers called the route. The faster we got to Berlin, the quicker the war would end. After all, that's why GI's came in the first place – to end the war. Traffic noise was constant, coming and going while artillery fired over our heads as troops moved through in trucks, tanks, Weapons Carriers, etc all headed across the Rhine.

The goings also were carrying supplies toward Berlin but were stalled by the lack of bridges across the Rhine with the exception of one that the Germany failed to completely demolish at Koln. The coming back trucks were full of captured P0W's on the way to P0W Camps in the rear. Every so often huge squads of Liberator bombers, Mustangs and P38's flew overhead for bombing runs inland. When we were bedded down in the mud and they flew overhead, I used to think those fly boys were sitting in the catbird seats, sleeping in dry sheets probably in warm quarters. But then again, I thought better and shuddered, as I envisioned them being sought by ack-ack guns of the artillery, trying to dodge the bursting shells around them at 10-15000 feet as they flew to their targets. All very romantic to imaginative mucho kids at the movies but in reality, very terrifying and not a scene one would want to be in. Coming down in flames was not my idea of a good way to die, if one had to die. All in all, they provided impressive sights and great contrails in the blue skies as they passed over head, especially if accompanied by the neat looking P38's and P47's.

I had gone ahead of the company to Rheinberg and it fell to me to sweep the site of a proposed permanent bridge and clear it of mines, if any. Sgt Gardner had made the plans for two bridges: one of steel and the other a wood trestle bridge. It took me an hour to first, sweep our side of the Rhine and then another hour to get across by boat and sweep the other side. I breathed a sigh of relief when I could find no mines – only shrapnel and old rusty iron bars in spots. This was unusual but the Germans had retreated so rapidly that they only had time to blow the bridges crossing the Rhine. However, they made a mistake. They left one partially intact (drivable) at Koln and the XIXth Corps crossed over on that.

I returned to Hdqtrs after the Koln crossing and delivered my report that the new bridge sites were clear of mines. M/Sgt Prescott and a crew including Sgt. Gardener surveyed the approaches and exits of the bridge. Almost immediately the building of the bridge began as parked trucks were already lined up carrying timbers along with pile drivers to drive the long logs to be used to support the trestles. Sgt Gardener got some sort of commendation for these bridges.

The assault on the Rhine fell to the XVI Corps to the north but the XIXth Corps crossed the Rhine on the night of the 23 of March on the one bridge that the Germans failed to demolish completely. It was

an important night for the Corps, shortening the war by many days and saved many lives as we secured and repaired the bridge.

There was a huge traffic jam of vehicles and tanks trying to cross the Rhine on the one way bridge that the Germans failed to demolish at Koln and on the Bailey Bridges that our Engineering Companies had built. Anticipation for the end of the war was in the air. Once over the Rhine, everybody knew that the war would be over in a matter of weeks or a few months, if you managed to stay alive. There was hardly any resistance once we crossed and you could sense the relief of joy in the air. All that remained was to capture Berlin and kill or capture Hitler.

Which reminds me of something that I never knew: Delbert Reason reported that on 18 Oct 1945, "There was a rooster mascot acquired at Aelbeck whose name was Oscar and that it was with us going to New Einde, Sichen, Heer, and Laurensberg. Reason said it disappeared sometime in early February near Heer, where Oscar became the "Head man" of a flock of chickens. Reason asks, "Did someone have Oscar for dinner or did he return to Heer and that flock of hens. Many of us would have liked to have gone back to Heer to see some "chick", so maybe that is what happened to Oscar".

As an aside, I swear that although I ate a rooster, I had nothing to do with Oscar, ever. My old rooster was running around the yard at Rheinberg on 25 Apr 45, two days after we move there; and, I was hungry for chicken. I thought to myself that I had better catch it and boil it before anyone else did the thing in. I cornered it and before you could say "***Gerwurztraminer Grapes***", I had it in a large pot of water with seasonings that I had borrowed from Brown, one of our Mess Cooks, and put it over a fire in the courtyard. I boiled it for four hours in the mess of spices. I invited others to the feast but for some reason I had no takers (Reflecting over Reason's comment, maybe they thought it was Oscar, the Company mascot). At chow time at night, I ate the whole thing by myself, 3-4 pounds or it – but, of course, not at one sitting. It was the best chicken I had ever eaten, even to this date in 2006. Now, if this rooster that I ate was truly Oscar, I apologize to those that knew him, for I never knew that we had a rooster for a mascot. *End of rooster stories*.

On 14 April '45 at 1000 hrs, we received the startling news that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had died on the 12th Most of the men attended a short service, mourning his passage. We were all sorry that he did not witness his hour of triumph – the war's end.

On 19 Apr 45, the 1142d crossed the Rhine on a Bailey Bridge that our engineers had constructed.

RHINE RIVER 0PERATION

(This part is taken verbatim from 1142nd's Delbert C. Reason's report. Sgt Harold L. Garner wrote this part and it depicts some of the functions that Engineering Groups performed such as maintaining roads and bridges, demolition of fortifications (bunkers, Siegfried Line, et.), getting building supplies, repairs to buildings, hospitals, etc for the Corps that we were attached to. Without us, the Armies could not move very far or fast in their push to Berlin.)

'We assisted Corps and Army in many ways. Before a drive would start we checked over possible roads and recommended which would be the best route. Most of this effort was by Sgts: William Prescott, William Wathen, John Fox, Nicholas Drahos, and I. We checked gravel pits and rubble piles which had been houses to see if the materials were suitable for fill. The dump truck companies and combat engineers battalion would keep the roads passable."

"Our first bridge in Germany was a Treadway bridge required for the capture of Aachen. The 208th Battalion was committed as infantry in that operation "

"We built the fixed bridge over the Roer River at Julich. I had selected the proper steel and designed the bridge. All the European steel was metric and of different cross section than U. S. steel. We logged the Hurtgen Forest for both bridge timbers and smaller logs to build corrugated road bases. We

built the Margraten Cemetery in Holland with elements, digging up many graves. We used car loads of mine pit props for corrugated roads in the cemetery. It was awfully wet that spring.

"During one drive I investigated a German hospital which was located on a mountain or high hill top. I watched as battle going on in the valley below, perhaps a mile away.

"During the Battle of the Bulge we were on constant recon, checking bridges for adequacy of explosives to blow the bridge if the Germans had widened the Bulge area. We also made sure that the G. I. stationed at the bridge knew what and how to blow the bridge and also when. We were told before we started that if the Germans did come, the Headquarters would already be back at the Muese River and for us to get there the best way we could. My driver and I were issued extra carbine clips, hand grenades, and a Bazooka with three rounds.

"I investigated a German OCS complex for use as a hospital but the sewage system was practically non-existent so we could not use it.

"I investigated a wire manufacturing company in Germany for possible barbed in expectation of many prisoners. That was north of us but I can't recall the name of the town. It may have been Hamm.

"I was asked by Major Charles Prout to get a detail of men and go to Cologne to guard a liquor warehouse. I jokingly asked him how much "breakage" I would be allowed and he withdrew his request.

"We planned the crossing locations for the assault across the Rhine. We were given parameters of some 30 miles or so as to where we were to cross. It really was a top-secret assignment. We had a basement room where we were quartered. Only Col. Pethick, Major Prout, Major John McWilliams and I were in on it. We ordered strip maps from Cologne to Holland and of course didn't use but the 30 miles or so. For our area I selected or recommended to the Ninth Army four points for crossing. They were located at Wesel, a spot between Wesel and Rheinberg, Rheinberg and Orsoy. Bridges were actually built at three of the places – all except between Wesel and Rheinberg."

The bridge at Orsoy was built three or four days after the assault crossing. Our bridge at Rheinberg was pretty well built near Kempen as a dry run for the combat engineers to practice weeks before the crossing. Sgt Prescott and several battalion Sergeants surveyed the ground between Rheinberg and the river edge. The purpose was to determine the requirements for fill dirt and rock for the road to the bridge site. All bridge parts, sand, gravel, and rubble for the approaches were headed and ready the day before the crossing and before the 11:30pm barrage started. Bridge work started at 5 am.

"Major McWilliams and I watched from the top floor of the roofless building (we had as Headquarters) the assault for some 30 minutes until we became concerned about the possibility of a counter battery action. There was an artillery battery behind us about a block away. The counter battery action started just after we went to bed.

"The enlisted men were in the cellar and the officers were on the second floor. A guard was at the door and I was with the telephone under a table on the main floor. A weapon's carrier just outside was hit and the blackout shades on the second floor was spattered with shrapnel. All officers retired to the cellar. The guard poked his head in and asked if he could come inside. Sure. The telephone wires had been knocked out so I nursed a dead phone and didn't realize it.

Our water supply the first night wasn't. All the jerry cans were filled with wine. The same thing was true at the 172d Headquarters where I had spent the hours before the assault had begun.

"A day or so after the Rhine crossing, Cpl. Harold MacKay and I went to Orsoy to establish a Bench Mark that was to be used in calibrating a river height gauge (Flood). The bridges were anchored with cables to weights on the bottom of the river in order that the bridge would stay reasonably straight across the river. A change in river depth could therefore affect the bridge.

"After the war I returned to Tennessee Valley Authority and was assigned to Hydraulics Division Investigations. My supervisor, Jim Goddard, explained how they took river height measurements. I told him it sounded familiar to how we did it on the Rhine. He smiled and offered one guess, as to who had set up the system in SHAEF.

"Jim also knew Col Neff whom I had met at Kassel, Ger. While on the conversion of a German Army Hdquarters into a 1,000 bed Army Hospital with the 172d Engr Battalion. Col. Neff was an observer. I was the only engineer on the job. The draftsmen were from the Battalion and all they had ever done was make overlays for roads and things. We had to make floor plans of all floors, remove walls, install bathrooms, repair bomb damage, install boilers, sterilize equipment and operating rooms - everything. We did everything except the electrical changes which were done by local firms. A lot of the labor was done by displaced Russians, such as the demolition of the walls, etc. They loved their work and thought we were going to tear down the building. The more skilled work was done by P0W"S who had been promised their release when the work was done. The 172d had guards at the entrance to the building and away we went on with the work.

"During the war, the 1142d worked closely with another Group. I thought it was the 1104th but, since they were not mentioned in the XIX Corps activities, it must have been another Group. At any rate, we played leapfrog a lot of the time. On an assault, one Group would stay with the drive while he other would stay to build fixed bridges or maintain the roads, etc. When the next push occurred the other Group would follow the infantry drive. The last time the 1142d went ahead was at the Rhine while the other Groups stayed behind and constructed a fixed bridge across the Rhine at Wesel. I worked on bridges as far east as Hamelin.

******End of S/Sgt /Gardener's Report *******

BACK TO THE WAR

From Rheinberg, we moved to our next Command Post with roads now clogged with refugees from other countries (Polish, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Russians, etc), most traveling with only the clothes on their backs, some pulling by hand small wagons and two wheel carts. Once in a while a horse drawn wagon was seen but most horses had been killed and eaten by now. Travel was slow but we arrived at Wulfen, Germany without incident where we stayed in another School and a Mess Hall building, both of which had been used by the German Army. A short distance south of us, Field Marshall Walter Model's German 13th Army Group was surrounded, caught in a pincer by the 1st and 9th Army in the Ruhr Pocket and after 18 days of fighting had to surrender. Not believing surrender was in his book, Model committed suicide on 18 Apr 45 near Düsseldorf. 300,000 troops were involved in this phase of the war.

At this time, our Group was occupied with doing the usual: construction, maintenance, and removal of bridges and protective booms along the Rhine, including the entire Sector of the 9th Army and additional work outside of the Sector albeit the work was being done by various attached units. This included some work on the East bank areas of the Rhine.

On May 1, '45 at 0800, we left Wulfen and camped at ErmsingHausen, Germany near Lippstadt where we stayed in a huge 5 story castle until 12 June 45. This one also had a moat and a drawbridge but it was far lovelier than the Queen's at Heer. It had a magnificent drive of about 100 yards lined on both sides by Linden trees that arched over it. It had a huge but sorely kept enclosed brick walled flower garden in the rear, replete with statues. This was about 150 feet by 40 ft in size. The whole castle overlooked open fields where crops were grown. At the front, outside of the moat, were stables and quarters for the help where a couple of women, especially a fine looking Blonde daughter were the tease and aspiration of many of the single boys; and, perhaps of some of the Officers. She was a sight for sore eyes. Most everyone except some of the Motor Pool lived in the castle. Its walls were adorned with huge magnificent paintings, some of our imagined Rockies. The main ball and dining rooms were ornate – huge with 18 foot ceilings lined with gold gilded molding.

It was here that I saw my first wild Roe deer fawn. It was unbelievably tiny when compared to our Virginia Whitetailed Deer. It weighed no more than 3-5 lbs. One of the truck drivers (can't recall his name) brought the fawn that he somehow acquired on a run to Brandenburg, Germany. He got it from another guy on a trade but didn't know what to do with it. I took it and bottle-nursed it and kept it in my room. Not having any water color or oil paints, I used our engineering colored India inks to sketch its head as it lay sleeping on the cushion or sack that it lay upon. It seemed to sleep with its head in an upright position. Seldom did I see it lying flat on its front legs or even on its sides. I still have this sketch locked in with another full framed sketch of an entire Roe fawn made by a German artist that I had liberated from a German book that lay in the rubble of a house. These I sent home and both are hanging there. It seems to me that this castle was called Black Thorn or Black Bird but since I don't have any notes from the past, I am not sure of its title.

I do know that it was here that I once stood on the landing of the first steps to the castle foolishly pressing my neck, trying to find a pressure point that would render me unconscious. Why I was doing this, I don't know but just below and in the front of 6-foot high parapet landing was the cellar entrance way (pit) with 4 steps leading to the cellar door. As I stood on the end of the landing, I suddenly found the pressure point and almost totally blacked out. In an almost unconscious state, I sensed that I was going to fall into the cell stairway and get seriously hurt. Instinctively I willed myself to leap outward in an attempt to clear the cellar steps as I fell. Fortunately, I did and I landed, barely conscious, on the sidewalk leading to the cellar, just clearing the edge of the pit. I landed heavily and jarringly on both heels. The sudden jar of my 210 lbs bruised both heels of my feet. For about a week, thereafter, I walked gingerly on the balls of my feet, marveling at my escape and stupidity for experimenting in such a dangerous place.

There was light moment at ErmsingHausen that involved the moat. The moat served as a swimming hole for me for just one day when Mahon C. Flake and I were fooling around on a warm day in the water. We were in our underwear and still had our boots on. For some reason, Stephenson and Reilly were ashore razzing us. We invited them in but they did not want to swim but we insisted. Since they did not want to take their clothes off, we caught Reilly and threw him in, clothes and all. Stephenson meanwhile, took pictures of the three of us (including Reilly) after we came out (See pix). Stephenson kept laughing at Reilly. We then, caught Stephenson and threw him in, too for laughing at Reilly. It was a childish thing to do but we were carried away by the moment for some unknown reason. We all do that sometime in our lives. Oftimes we regret it, for it has unforetold consequences but at other times, it seems to turn out well. This one had no real consequences except wet clothing and it provided a well needed laugh for all. The castle also provided a well needed resting spot for all.

On May 8, we received the sad news that the war was over even though there was no formal Peace Treaty being signed. We had no wild celebrations but there were a few bottles around that enabled a few of us to drink to the occasion. Suddenly, the war in the Pacific loomed large in our minds. Would we be shipped there to fight jungle rot, as we had read?

Col. Pethick wrote for May: "The coming of VE Day found the 1142nd operating in an area of responsibility centering on Lippstadt, Germany. During the month, the Group was principally engaged in bridge construction; inventorying and hauling engineer supplies and materials; completion of a War Criminals Camp at Rocklinghausen; and road maintenance. A total of 2,783,195 Board Feet of 1" and 2" lumber was hauled to sidings and loaded on railroad cars. This material was intended for use in crating equipment for overseas shipment. On 30 May, the 1503rd Engr Water Supply Co., left for indirect redeployment to the Pacific. Shortly after VE day, a schedule of organized athletics for all attached units was put into effect."

The near end of the war relieved the tensions of the unknown and suddenly it appeared that all of our forebodings of death were null and void. It was like a huge weight being lifted from all of our shoulders. We knew somehow that we were going to survive and return home. It was that good. One other incident occurred while at the castle that dampened that feeling somewhat. Somebody captured two German aviators and they were held under guard in the basement at the castle and then turned over to the Corps whereby they eventually became P0W's.

Col. Pethick wrote for June: "On 6 June, the 625th Engr Light Equipment Co., left for direct redeployment to the Pacific.

"On 9 June, the Group Hdqtrs moved to Treysa Germany- the Group having been assigned a new area of responsibility further south. Operations were principally in the Kassel-Paderhorn-Giessen areas." This was about 111 miles from Lippstadt and the Company stayed there until 30 June.

Col. Pethick wrote: "On 15 June, when the 9th Army ceased to be operational, the Group was reassigned to 7th U.S. Army and the 1142nd was re-categorized as a Category lV Unit. As a majority of the men in the Hdqtrs Co. of the Group had less than the required 85 points to get shipped home, a complete reorganization was indicated."

Here was where dreadful rumors caught up with us. As the Allies moved farther into Germany, Jewish concentration camps were found in each of the Allies territories. Millions of carcasses in mass graves were found along with a few fortunate live ones that could be nursed back to health. It was unbelievable and heinous. Of course, in retrospect in 2006, it still is, even though some Iranian Leaders now stupidly claim that these camps were a figment of imaginations.

It was about here that T/Sgt Fox and I flew to Paris in a C47 on a three day pass. I don't remember much about the trip but we went to the Lourve and the Notre Dame Cathedral but couldn't go up the Eiffel, as it was closed; and, it seemed to me that it rained. I don't recall where we stayed but, both being married, we did not stay or sleep with any women. We returned the same way, by C47.

Treysa was a quiet village located I hilly country – a Mother Goose fairy land in comparison to the other places we had bivouacked in. Fox and I were in a small house with a couple other guys. It sat on a hill overlooking some of the narrow cobblestone streets of the town below us. This had a canal in it with a bridge where it was rumored that one of the village girls went daily to swim nightly in the nude. OooH, La La, as the French would say! Here, the prohibition of fraternization with the girls and other civilians was lifted. As Reason stated, "We could now do legally what we had been doing all along!"

Treysa had its own railroad station whereby hundreds of refugees boarded daily on the way to parts unknown. It was a hectic time to be traveling by rail: crowded conditions, jammed bodies, no seating room, and sometimes, destinations unknown. I did not do much sightseeing in the town as I was not there for long (see below) but I vaguely remember its muted brown colors set in dark verdant green vegetation- a nice quiet restless village near a railroad track and stream.. I liberated a German Standard Typewriter here that I used to write V-mails on. It had the "Y" transposed with the "A" key. It still sits in my library as a memento of nearly 4 years of an almost but not quite wasted life in the Army. I also kept an Italian Carcano Carbine, similar to the one that supposedly killed President Kennedy. It was a sweet shooting rifle. When I got home, I shot a few whitetailed Deer with it. I also kept a sharpshooter version of the German Mauser rifle that had a very long barrel.

June 15, 1945 was the last day of operation and occupation for the Ninth Army. I had started with the 9th upon induction at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, so it was fitting that I should be in it at the end of its career in Europe.

As far as the War went, we were finished. The 9th Army had advanced to the Elbe River outside of Magdeburg on the 11th of April and sat there waiting for the Russians. Magdeburg lay some three-quarter miles from the Berlin Highway on the Elbe River, separated from the Highway by open agriculture fields. It was a village fit for fairy tales. Walt Disney could not have drawn a better Camelot --type village - it was so beautiful in full sunlight, surrounded by green fields of spring.

The Elbe was a mystical boundary over which Armies, Companies, Battalions could not cross. Individually, troops could cross and go to Berlin but not the others. In getting to the Elbe, the XlX Corps had taken 172,000 prisoners. The Russian armies were rumored close day after day, but they didn't appear. Finally, on the 30th of April, after a two-day running fight from Zerbst, Germany the 125th Cavalry

Squadron of the Corps' 113th Cavalry Group, made the first Ninth Army contact with the Russians, men of the XXVII Guard Corps under General Cherakmanov near Wittenberg on the Elbe.

It was about this time that we learned why we could not cross the Elbe when we read the STARS AND STRIPES newspaper. It seemed that Truman, Eisenhower and Churchill had made a deal at Potsdam (Potsdam Agreement) with Russia, agreeing that the Elbe would be a dividing line for the occupation of Germany. Russia would administer the East side of the Elbe and England and the U.S. would administer the West side. But, they would split Berlin, which lay on the Russian side of the Elbe, each controlling their half.

This was a huge political blunder that eventually created the start of the Cold War with Russia. Russia eventually built the Berlin Wall that divided Berlin into two parts. This blunder also became a bigger blunder for Russia. It eventually caused Russia to go bankrupt many years later, trying to keep up in the Arms Race. It proves that all old politicians on both sides of a war should be made to sit in the front lines of a war and be the first to be killed if they declared war.

It was at this time in Treysa that I had read that GI's now could go to various colleges throughout Europe to study whatever pleased them to enable to fill in the time while waiting for their return to the States. Prior to this time, one had to have 85 points to get shipped home. This was lowered to 65 points. I had nearly 65 points, the magic number needed to get on aboard a ship to go home but I lacked 3 or 4 points. I was torn between going to England to study their Agriculture or go Spain to partake in a Sculpture Course at Biarritz College on its East Coast on Biscayne Bay or go to Grenoble, France to study French and French Culture. The latter promised side trips to old Roman amphitheaters, trips into the Alps, and other intriguing places, so I chose Grenoble, thinking that when I got back to the 1142d that I'd take the Sculpture course in Spain. I had taken some art courses at Cornell and had studied oil painting under Walter King Stone and Christian Midjo there as well had taken a few sketch courses under a Professor Baker and his Assistant. Midjo wanted me to become a full fledged artist and offered to get me a Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. I was tempted but the War intervened. Anyhow, I was intrigued with the Sculpting idea.

About August 18th, 1945, I returned to Treysa and the 1142d via a C47 plane to Paris but I don't recall how I got back to Treysa from Paris. I don't think I came back by truck but I don't remember a plane either. When I got to Treysa, the 1142d had disappeared. No one really knew where it had gone.

Col. Pethick wrote for June: "At midnight of 30 June 1945, the old 1142nd Engineer Combat Group, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist. The majority of the officers and men were transferred to Category l and ll Units. Col. Hugh W. Colton assumed command of the now reorganized 1142nd Engineer Combat Group and the Group Hdqtrs was moved to the vicinity of Bad Nauheim, Germany, attached to XXlll Corps of the 7th Army. (This was near Frankfort**.)** Here the Corps stayed for a while administering the Occupation of Germany for a while and then left for the states.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE 1142ND

Reason states that "On June 30, 1945, Special Order 95 transferred 54 of our 67 members to the 1104th Engineer Combat Group. Only a few high point men stayed with the 1142d which was scheduled to return to the states. With the switch the 1104th became part of the Army of Occupation. We were told that we would be moving to a new location as soon as a suitable one could be found. (The ironic part of this was this: Had I not gone to Grenoble, I might have been shipped home in the summer instead of 5 months later. They had reorganized, taking the high point men with them to Bad Nauheim 100 miles or so away while the main body of men remained in Treysa under the 1104th name.) Had I found them, I might have gone home sooner.

On 16 Aug 45, Col. Pethick left our outfit and expected to be sent to the South Pacific from the ETO. We still were in Treysa and left there on 24 August for Ziegenberg, Germany. The old 1104th had just vacated a German Ordinance building and we moved into it. Only a part of Ziegenberg had been

destroyed and we wondered why because there seemed to be no targets there. We soon were told that there was a large underground city at the edge of the village and that the bombs were intended for that facility.

The 1104th took over a beer parlor and a dance hall there and at the first dance, the only girls there were those that worked for our outfit. In the weeks to come this changed and soon we had more women there than men.

Personnel changed every week as some GI's left on points while others came in to replace them. On 16 Sept 45, the 1104th was re-classified from Class One Army of Occupation to Class Four Home and Discharged. On 14 Oct 45 the 1104th became another outfit headed for home.

While not many of the original 1142d members were left with the Group, we all transferred to the 172d Engineer Combat Battalion on 20 Oct 45. While we were not all assigned to the same company, at least we were still in the same outfit. Headquarters Co. of the 172nd moved into our former quarters in Ziegenberg while the other companies were located in nearby towns. By the time that the 172nd was slated to go home in February 1946 only a few of the original men of the old 1142d were still in the outfit.

Delbert C. Reason signed up for an extra six months and transferred with some of the 172nd to the 333rd Special Service Regiment. He did this so he could complete his arrangements to marry a girl from London that he had met in Bournemouth, Eng. four days before the 1142d had left for France. He had become engaged to her while on furlough to England a few days after the war had ended. His wife Patricia and he had been back to Bournemouth several times and found the old hotel where we first stayed pretty much the same but found that the hotel now houses senior citizens. "

I had nothing left to remind me of the 1142d. All my clothing and possessions were gone with the lost company. Fortunately I had taken my camera on the trip to Grenoble with me, as it was my most valuable possession. A Major at the old 1142nd Hdqtrs did not know where it had gone. I stayed there, figuring that I was attached to the outfit now. I then again started to contemplate another trip to the sculpture college in Biarritz, Spain that I mentioned but then the uncertainty of going home set in. I thought that I might go home within the 8 weeks that I would spend in Biarritz but then again, I might not. So, I did not go any place. As a result, I spent the next five months in limbo and did not get orders to leave Europe until sometime in December. All that time (5 months) had been wasted. I could have gone to 10 colleges in that time had I known when I was to leave. Such is life - dotted with "If onlys".

A few days later, the Major called me in and said he had a Directive, looking for a Demolitions Expert – my MO.. He wanted to know if I wanted to join another outfit that was forming up to go to the Pacific. They needed a Demolitions Expert and said that I and one other guy in a Battalion were available. I said, "Send the other guy. I have enough points to go home and I don't want to go to the Pacific". Much to my relief, he did but, in a week or so, I got orders to transfer to the 101st Airborne in the 3rd Army. These were the guys who had parachuted into the Bastogna to fight the Battle of the Bulge. It turned out that this outfit too was waiting to go home. I breathed a sigh of relief, for there was no danger of it going to the Pacific. We were located in a small villa-like place in a town whose name I did not even dain to find out. I read, wrote letters and spent the sunny afternoons stripped to my shorts, laying on a cot in the garden, soaking in the rays, getting a sun tan.

Somehow, I fell in with a group of 4 other men at the 101st Airborne who had bull sessions about what they were going to do when they got out. One was a guy by name of Stevenson who had an uncle that lives on Knob Hill in Pittsburgh, apparently with tons of money. Another guy had developed a rash of warts all over his body and was being held by the medics, trying to figure out a cure and why he got the warts. It was a strange tale of woe, especially since he had to go into a hospital in Marseilles for a cure and would not go home before he got cured. I wonder how long he had to stay and whether he ever got cured.

Well, the gist of the bull sessions resulted in a bond, sealed by the swearing of the 5 of us, promising that on New Year' eve we'd all meet under the Hotel Biltmore clock at Grand Central Station for a reunion and that we'd all go to Georgetown U to take the Harvard 100 book course under the G. I Bill; and, then go out into the world to make our fortunes because of what we learned from the books. (Of

course, this never happened. I got out of The Army the day before New Year's Eve and I was not about to go to NY City to stand outside under the Biltmore clock. I wanted to go to see my wife who was perhaps 80 miles away at William & Mary College in Virginia. I remembered the pact again years later and wondered if any one had shown up. If anybody, I think it would have been Stevenson. He seemed to be the most carefree, had the most money, and a rich uncle to fall back upon.

Well, finally, at a forgotten date in December, I boarded a train to Marseilles, France and after a short stay there in pyramidal tents, I boarded a Troop ship and was on my way to Norfolk, Virginia. I enjoyed the boat ride through the Mediterranean, through the Strait of Gibraltar where we picked up a couple pods of Pilot whales and a few dolphins. There were hardly any birds to see or to check out. Knowing that I was going to be seasick part of the time, I opted to become a butcher aboard ship in exchange for a bunk in the middle of the ship that seemed to rock the least. There, I primarily boned hams for a couple of days and spent most of my time reading and sleeping in my bunk and looking for seabirds of which I did not see many.

I think we spent 10-12 days at sea, finally docking at Norfolk on December 26th. I don't think I ever was told the name of the ship. We all were loaded on Army trucks and ended up at nearby Camp Patrick Henry, less than 100 miles away. Here we got new clothes and had the option of keeping some our old too. I kept my combat boots for use in hunting and field work. The "debriefer", writing up my discharge, tried to give me a medal for my non-existent battle with the 101st Airborne in Bastogna. I had to argue him out of it, stating that I was merely a transient hitch-hiker with the 101st – that I really did not belong.

I was really disappointed when he did not offer me a medal for al the paper work and service with the 1142d. After all, I had blown a few bunkers, swept the banks of important bridge crossing sites on the Rhine for buried mines; and, I had blown a secret German Post Office Safe, liberating some German Stamps and a set of silverware within. The silverware went to a Battalion Demolition Expert who was with me as a souvenir while the 100 or so plates of Hitler stamps went to my driver Coy Hewett, Jr who collected stamps. As for me, I kept 5-6 sheets of the stamps as a reminder of the deed. I thought that all of that plus about 3 1/2 years of Army Service deserved something special at discharge. I must confess that I did not go away empty handed. He issued me a chit that was good for about $600 (? not sure) dollars as seed money from the Bursar. He also gave me 4 colorful small bars that I could pin on my chest. They represented the Rhineland, Ardennes, and the Central European Campaign that the 1142d and I had participated in and even a Good Conduct Bar. But, as I sat there in my final interview, I sighed. I was one of the lucky ones. I survived and came back. It really was not a total loss. I learned a few things. One cannot live nearly three years without learning something new and useful. Whatever that was! Right now, I would like to look at the ribbons to see what their colors really look like but I don't know what happened to them.

I was discharged after breakfast on the morning of 31 Dec 1945 at Camp Patrick Henry and took a bus to Richmond, Va. Caught another one to William & Mary College where I surprised my wife who had finally graduated in June; and, who was now gainfully employed by the College in some athletic capacity while she waited for me to show up. I told the landlady who I was. She let me in Gidge's (her Nick name) room so that I could surprise her when she got home from work. I then visited the Florist and ordered him to deliver one Red Rose daily to my wife for the rest of January, much to her delight. .Her tenure was up January 31, so I stayed with her until we could depart for Aurora, NY

While she was at work, I wrote letters for jobs; and, if all failed, a letter of application to Cornell University for an MS candidacy under an old Prof. of mine, E. Laurence Palmer, with a major of Conservation Education under him and a minor in Agronomy, starting February 01, 1946. That done, I had nothing to do except read, walk around, and sleep. I had been to Williamsburg several times, so sightseeing was not on the agenda, Bored, I went to the local airfield and signed up for flying lessons, blowing about $100 bucks for the 6 hours dual training required before I could solo. Being a wildlife biologist, I figured that if I landed a job in Alaska I'd need to know how to fly. I soloed after I did the required tail spins, stalls, emergency landings and the several days of practicing 3-point landings with the instructor. When January was up I had 9 hours of solo but I must admit that I did not like the feeling of

doing tail spins which was a misnomer, as the airplane spun for the ground nose first. (PS: I never piloted a plane alone ever since although I did dual time with other Conservation pilots). By the time we left W&M, I had been accepted at Cornell for my MS and I had completed my arrangements with the GI Bill of Rights people to get an apartment and free tuition at Cornell. Everything was falling in place for a change.

One Final Note: As of this date December 12th, 2006, there are only about 15 members of the 1142nd still alive, most still living in North Carolina, one in Texas, and I in New York State. On November 11, 2006 there was a reunion in North Carolina and 7 showed up with their wives and all had a good time. Bernie Wicker had found me on the Internet after 51 years of search but it was too late for me to go…even so, North Carolina is a long way off and I don't know if I would have gone, if I had known in time. Such is life. However, one good thing came out of this contact: I wrote this report, inspired by the computer CD disk of Stephenson's photos and a report on the 1142nd by Reason that he sent me.

Photo by Harvey Horne, Nov 11, 2006

So, it is fitting that I include a photo taken by Harvey Horne of the intrepid seven that made the reunion. William Pace (center) was the victim of a Buzz Bomb that fell while we were in Sichen, Belgium in 1943. It is also fitting that I, as their part time lst Sgt, give these men, the Officers, and those gone by, a final Salute for a job well done. However, Man will always fight wars so long as politicians and religious leaders put their greed and superstitious beliefs ahead of the welfares of their people. Let's hope that the world becomes one in all things before Mankind leaves this scorched earth for space and for possible extinction, I hope.

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The complete log of our moves, including the names of towns, dates and times from the time the 1142nd organized and left Camp Crowder to the day that the war was over was taken from the references appended, and the Historical Section, Army War College, Wash, D.C. through The Adjutant General, Wash., D. C. *Photos of Officers and Men were Signal Corps Photos* found on the *1142d Combat Engineers Memorial Website* on the Internet and were probably taken by somebody from my old 166th Signal Photo Company.

Nick Drahos Dec 20, 2006