

War Era Story Project 2012

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My Army career started in September of 1940 when I joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) as a freshman at Clarkson College in Potsdam, New York. This was about a year before the Japanese attacked our Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

I enlisted in the Corps of Engineers, Enlisted Reserve Corps of the U.S. Army in November 1942, while still in college, at the age of 19 years and 6 months. I was called to active duty as a Private in May of 1943 and ordered to Fort Belvoir, Virginia for 17 weeks of basic training. At the end of this time, I was ordered to return to college for further education, pending the availability of openings at the Officer Candidate School at Fort Belvoir. Openings did occur after one more semester at Clarkson, so I was then promoted to Corporal and ordered to return again to Fort Belvoir for Officer Training.

I graduated from the Officer Candidate School in July of 1944 as a Second Lieutenant in the Engineer Reserves of the Army of the United States of America. My first assignment was with the Headquarters Company of the 1256th Engineer Combat Battalion, located at Camp McCain, Mississippi. There I was designated as the Reconnaissance Officer on July 13, 1944. Ten days later, I was ordered to report to the newly forming 1346th Engineer Combat Battalion, at Camp Polk, Louisiana, first as a Platoon Commander and then as the Assistant S-3 (Intelligence) until January 1945.

As this Battalion was being formed, it became apparent that the Army was sending us a large number of personnel who were of marginal use to a Combat Engineer organization. First, the Senior Officers had been awarded direct commissions on the basis that their civilian experience with respect to heavy equipment (bulldozers, road graders, etc.) was useful to the Corps of Engineers. However, whatever training they had in combat leadership was questionable. Second, the rank and file soldiers were sent to us from stateside units such as Coast Artillery, Military Police and so forth, where there was now a surplus of people to perform those duties. A Combat Engineer Battalion at that time consisted of about 600 soldiers, but during the formation of the 1346th we needed nearly twice that amount of men in order to attain the proper strength. Many of these retreads, due to their physical limitations (e.g., glass eyes, club feet, etc.) had to be eliminated during our first 17 weeks of training.

During the period from January to June 1945, the Battalion had to participate in field testing, which is required before a unit can be sent for duty overseas. We took two separate field tests and failed in both, primarily as a result of the incompetence of the Senior Staff, the commanding Lieutenant Colonel, a Major who was the Executive Officer and another Major who was in charge of Intelligence (S-3). As the Assistant S-3, I was in a position to observe this first hand. Their decisions in the field were seldom logical. After failure of the first field test, the Battalion had to repeat the 17 weeks of training. After the

second failure there was no opportunity to try again, so now we had to prepare for overseas duty. At this point I believe that most of the Junior Officers had completely lost faith in our leadership.

Since the war in Europe was now over and a peace Treaty had been signed with Germany on May 8, 1945, we were ordered to the Pacific Theater of Operations. We traveled across the United States by train from May 29, 1945 to June 3, 1945 ending up at Seattle. The Battalion then shipped out of the Seattle Port of Embarkation, but our destination was a secret. We traveled across the Pacific by way of Eniwetok and Ulithi and finally landed at Okinawa on July 25, 1945. By that time, the battle for Okinawa was almost over. Most of us now thought that the Battalion would probably have to become involved in the invasion of Japan (we were unaware at the time that the invasion strategy, Operation Downfall, had already been planned). As a result of the Potsdam Conference that began on July 16th, Japan was given an ultimatum that was refused on July 28, 1945. Then in quick succession, at the approval of President Truman, atom bombs were dropped on the Japanese mainland at Hiroshima (August 6th), and at Nagasaki (August 9th). After this and the threat that Tokyo could be next on the list, Japan quickly accepted the Potsdam Ultimatum and August 15th became known as V-J Day. Finally, on September 2, 1945 General McArthur accepted the formal surrender on the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

The 1346th Engineer Combat Battalion left on LST's for occupation duty in Japan on October 4th, 1945 and, after encountering a nasty typhoon, arrived in Yokohama on October 14, 1945. We then proceeded to Kumigaya, Japan, where we occupied an aircraft plant. Since I had broken my foot in an accident on Mogmog Island, Ulithi, I was of no use to the Battalion at this point and was ordered home via the hospital ship *U.S.S. Comfort* and many other stateside convalescent facilities.