

NO TASK TOO GREAT IN FRANCE



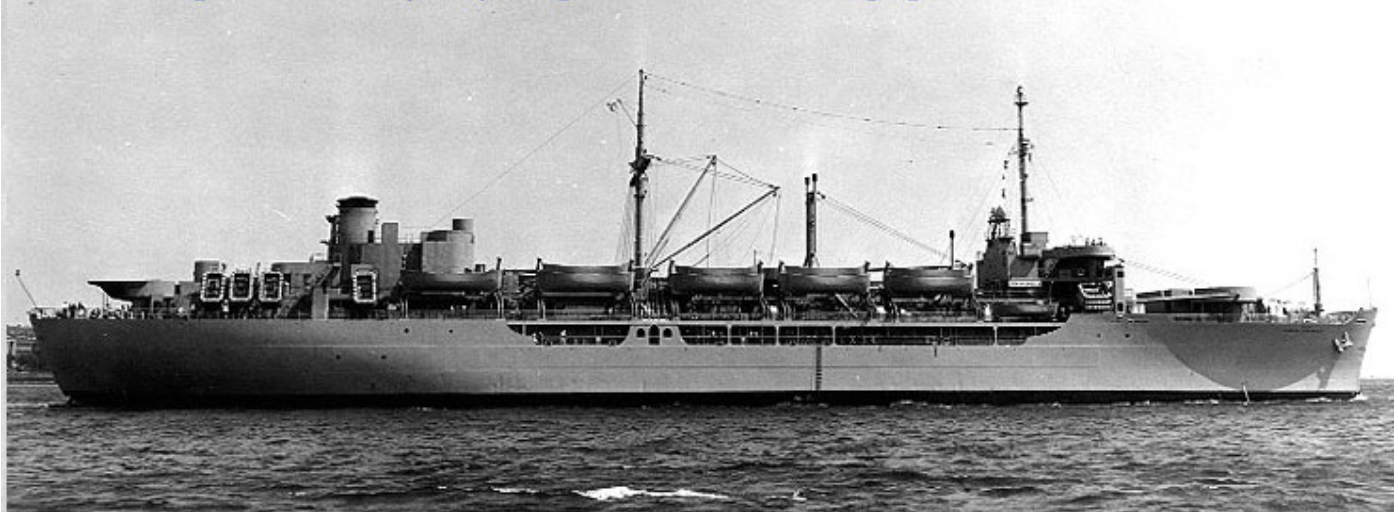
CHAPTER IV OF THE HISTORY OF THE 97TH ENGINEER BATTALION (CONSTRUCTION)

Updated 11 December 2014

Early in November 1951, the first contingent of the 97th Engineer Const Battalion reported to their New Orleans Port of Embarkation. By noon of the 9th, all the 97th had boarded the *USNS General A. W. Greely*. Sailing precisely at 1600 that day, the 97th Engineers began their 5,050-mile cruise to Bremerhaven, Germany. The high point of the journey was the tremendous Thanksgiving Day Dinner given on 21 November. With good weather much of the trip; the voyage came to an end after 14 days on 23 November 1951.

Photo # NH 61583 USNS General A.W. Greely, circa early 1950s

SOURCE: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-g/ap141.htm>



The battalion debarked the Greely and immediately boarded a troop train. Twenty-three hours later, familiar Army trucks met the men at the station to take them to their new home – the Advance Section of the European Command's Communication Zone stationed at Toul, France. However, the battalion was to remain under the Engineer Division of the European Command for the next half year.

As it was quickly becoming a 97th Engineer tradition, the men were only mildly surprised to jump from these trucks into ankle deep mud at their new tent city. Welcome to France, men of the 97th.

The French people were as surprised to see the battalion, as the men of the 97th were to see them. After natural period of adjustment the people began to prove very helpful and friendly to their new visitors. The basic language difficulties were slowly overcome and the basis for a strong and enduring cooperative spirit was established.

Since the primary mission of Engineers is to build, the 97th lost little time in getting down to business in France. Several attachments to the battalion were made. The 502nd Engineer Fire Fighting Platoon stayed with the 97th for one year. The 402nd Engineer Dump Truck Company and the 74th Engineer Heavy Equipment Company complimented the three existing construction companies of the 97th Engineer Const Battalion.

Before getting a chance to settle in Toul, however, HQ's plus Service Company moved to Verdun, France, on 2 January 1952. HQ's was established in offices at Maginot Caserne in Verdun. HQ's plus Service Company was again moved into tents behind the Caserne for a period of ten days and then moved into the Caserne. In the meantime, the line companies began their primary construction missions.

Construction through January continued at a good pace, but after duty activities were curtailed by bad weather, and the battalion had to provide its own recreation and entertainment.

By February the battalion had received about 95% of its Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) equipment and most of it was ready to roll. This afforded the maintenance sections a breathing spell within which to organize a sound shop procedure.

The first of March brought about two interesting highlights. First, the dependents arrived in the command. Second, the battalion began to publish its own Unit Newspaper name “Chez Nous” (Our Home) which was distributed to all men of the 97th twice each month. However an increased workload as the construction season began in earnest soon put an end to such an ambitious extracurricular undertaking.

A few changes in 1952 **MAJ John D. Wieben**, the Executive Officer, assumed command of the battalion on 13 April 1952, as **LTC John B. Crawford** was transferred after commanding for 10 months. At the close of July 1952, the 97th was officially relieved from assignment to the Engineer Division, European Command and assigned to the European Command, Communications Zone. Starting on 25 August, the battalion underwent an administrative integration of Negro personnel into the unit—which reached 19% of total manpower by the end of the year.

The summer of 1952 was an active one in many areas. Work centered about maintenance at a time when lack of parts for the new type equipment kept the deadline rate high. On the lighter side, recreation facilities were steadily improved. More sight seeing tours were arranged and over 60 Enlisted Men went to Luxembourg to see the world famous Harlem Globetrotters. Softball teams were entered in all leagues possible, although a heavy workload kept participation at a minimum. By 12 August another change of command had been effected, as **LTC James B. McNally** assumed the position of Battalion Commander.

With the advent of autumn, the task of providing winterized shelter and other essential facilities for command troops were under taken by the battalion. This project covered the Verdun, Nancy, Toul, and Metz areas and was given top priority. All other construction projects were delayed until the Winterization process was completed.

Before 1952 came to a close, a major reorganization was in store for the 97th. On 5 December 1952, the battalion was assigned to the 313th Engineer Construction Group, with headquarters in Verdun. The 313th assumed responsibility for the area formerly assigned to the 97th. At the same time, the 420th Dump Truck Company and the 747th Heavy Equipment Company were relieved from attachment to the 97th and assigned to the 313th Group.

For the first half of 1953, HHC plus Service Company and Company C were situated at Maginot Caserne, Verdun. A Company was stationed at Toul Engineer Depot while Company B had taken up HQ’s at Trois Fontaines Ordnance Depot. 1 January 1953 the assigned strength of the battalion was 25 Officers, 11 Warrant Officers, and 841 Enlisted Men of the 97th Engineers.

Probably the most interesting work undertaken during the first half of 1953 was that performed by 20 men from Company C. They were sent TDY under the command of **1LT John Wessborg** to Colois to recover a B-24 Bomber downed in the area during WWII. Although hampered by steady rain and terrific winds, the wrecked plane was soon recovered and various parts were salvaged. The project drew wide spread interest, attracting hundreds of French spectators daily and teams of inspecting officers from throughout France and Germany.

Throughout the summer and fall of the 1953 construction season, the 97th was performing its general mission of constructing and rehabilitating numerous facilities required by the Communications Zone of the European Command. The battalion closed out the year at a fairly level strength: 25 Officers, 13 Warrant Officers, and 852 Enlisted Men.

With the end of the Korean Conflict the de-escalation of unit strength hit the battalion quickly. By the 12th of July 1954 the 97th had been reduced to 20 Officers, 10 Warrant Officers and 696 Enlisted Men.

[1955 (Source: STARS & STRIPES, 9 April 1955):

[The 313th Engineer Construction Group, located at Verdun, France, has been re-designated as the 32nd Engineer Construction Group.](#)

The unit designation and colors of the 313th are being returned to reserve status at the group's home station in St. Louis, Mo. The 313th Engineer Group has been in France for the past three years.]

Organizationally, another change came about with the 32nd Engineer Group took over from the 313th Group, a unit that had served with distinction in Korea, and this new Headquarters had control of the 97th Engineer Construction Battalion, the 525th Dump Truck Company, the 510th Engineer Heavy Equipment Company, plus the 40th Engineer Construction Company. The 32nd Group was given the general mission of supporting the Advanced Section (ADSEC) of Communication Zone (COMZ).

After two and a half years of service, LTC McNally was prepared to change duty assignments. In February 1955, MAJ Robert A. Atkins was chosen to command the 97th Engineers. Many auxiliary responsibilities required MAJ Atkins to absent himself from Battalion HQ, and the battalion entered into a very fluid period for unit commanders. The Executive Officer MAJ Walter A. Steers acted as commander intermittently for a period of 72 days. His successor as Executive Officer, MAJ Chesley J. Noel, served for a total of eight days as commander during MAJ Atkins' tenure.

In February 1956, Headquarters of the 97th was still located at Verdun. A Company was constructing Vassincourt Kaserne. B Company had their constructive hands full with constructing the new warehouse at Toul Engineer Depot. C Company was charged with all new construction and basic upkeep projects of the Verdun Military District. For eight months of 1956, B Company sent its second platoon to work on the construction of four cement block mess halls at Nancy. The project included installing all plumbing and electrical facilities, painting interior and exteriors, and general landscaping. This effort provided a central facility where native employees of the Nancy Ordnance Depot could eat in comfort.

On 21 April 1956, two servicemen were reported lost in the Verdun area. They had been sight seeing at nearby Fort *de* Tavannes when they fell into a deep open shaft. One of the pair managed to crawl to safety and sought assistance for his comrade. Components of HQ's Company and C Company worked in the funnel system and the airshaft for six days before reaching the second victim. An odd assignment, indeed, but a typically well-performed task accomplished by the professionals of the 97th Engineer Const Battalion.

In the spring of 1956, the battalion was busy conducting a design contest for the unit crest. An award of \$25.00 and a three-day pass was announced. As a result, the current unit crest was adapted and the motto officially recognized: "**No Task Too Great.**" Plans to have the crest manufactured and distributed were quickly implemented, and each man proudly wore his unit's distinctive insignia wherever he went in France. It became a common symbol to the French people who would invariably comment, "Ah! Quatre-Vingt Dix-Sept!"

The next change of command occurred on 20 November 1956 when LTC Chester D. Brewer arrived to take charge of the proud 97th! During LTC Brewer's long reign as commanding officer MAJ Chesley J. Noel served as acting commander, for a total of 19 days. CPT William P. Gojska acted as commander for three periods totaling nine days.

Since arriving in France the 97th Engineers had constructed major Depots from Verdun to Bar-Le-Duc, France. For their overall outstanding performance in these construction efforts, higher headquarters all over Europe learned of the 97th's "No Task Too Great" attitude and achievements. In February 1957, the 97th Engineer Const Battalion received a citation for meritorious service in France from November 1951 to February 1957 from the 32nd Engineer Group (Const) signed by COL R. W. de Lancey.

Beginning in February 1957, each company underwent four weeks of training at the COMZ Pipeline Training School at Chinon Engineer Depot, France, operated by 543rd Engineer (Pipeline) Company personnel. The battalion took three months to cycle everyone through while still conducting a normal construction season. On 10 April 1967, the battalion received more recognition; this time from BG William R. Woodward, CG, Advance Section Communication Zone (ADSEC) United States Army Europe (USAREUR). The battalion had

absorbed into its already full schedule the task of converting a dilapidated warehouse at Bevaux, Verdun, into the sorely needed American Youth Activity Recreation Center by working 24 hours per day. Still another job well done.

Although it had been celebrated in 1956, the unit had not officially designated its birthday. In accordance with directives from the Department of the Army and Fort Belvoir, Engineer Center, on 16 April 1957, the 97th officially named 1 October as Unit Organization Day. This actually commemorates the two births' the 97th Engineer Battalion has had. 1 October 1933 is the official date the 97th first appeared on the rolls of the Regular Army as the 56th Engineer Battalion (Separate). Also, it was on 1 October 1951 that the 97th Engineer Construction Battalion was reactivated at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

April 1957 appears to have been a great month for the 97th Engineers. On 24 April, a letter of appreciation was received from **COL H. A. Holmstrom**, Commander, US Army Engineer Department, Toul, France. Company B was congratulated for their fine softball and baseball diamond construction and renovation. COL Holmstrom noted the daily 24-hour effort, which went into this project. A similar letter followed on 31 May 1957 after the new tennis court had been completely installed.

Another side project was under taken by four skilled members of the battalion who devoted many hours of off duty time and effort to the fabrication of a large plaque for the Military Police at Verdun. Acceptance was made by the 61st Military Police Company, and a letter of appreciation came from **MAJ Renwick N. Riley**, Provost Marshall at US Army Garrison, Verdun, France. The plaque was to be displayed at all official and social functions of the Military Police Units at Verdun. This was a fine example of the extensive effort being made by the men to create a cooperative atmosphere among all units at Verdun.

Company B put construction projects into full swing in the summer of 1957 by constructing a bridge training site and providing cadre for instruction on how to build timber trestle, railway and Bailey Bridges during the annual bridge training at Jean D'Arc. After A and C Company had benefitted from their instruction, it was decided that this training would be made available to the 40th Engineer Company at Metz. Before the season was over, all engineer units in the domain of the Advance Sector Communication Zone (ADSEC) took advantage of this opportunity, another service from the professional 97th Engineers.

Many projects continued on into the New Year. Starting in a forest area on the French border, near Luxembourg, B Company went to work building a mess hall that would take six cold months to complete. A concurrent five-month project was under way at Chalons Sur-Marne. One platoon went to a Petroleum Oil Lubrication (POL) tank farm to construct a motor pool and maintenance building, completing it in February 1958.

It was also in 1958 that another quite unusual assignment was given to the 97th Engineers. Secretary of the Army, Buckner, was in the process of selecting an unknown soldier from WWII for Arlington's new famous shrine. He chose to visit the huge **Epinal American Cemetery**, Dinozé, France. At a Memorial Day ceremony, **General Edward J. O'Neill**, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Communication Zone, Europe, selected the Unknown to represent the European Theater. One gravesite would be selected at which the casket was raised and transported to aircraft for its flight back to the United States. The 97th supplied the company-sized detail, which prepared the ceremony site for the big occasion. Bleachers were erected, the ground was worked off, and security was provided. At the impressive ceremony, the 97th was responsible for all the physical acts involved in removing and transporting the Unknown Soldier. "No Task Too Great," however unique.

A major construction effort went into Toul Rozalier Air Base throughout 1958. A hanger, parking area, culvert and roads were added to the base. The platoons of Company B worked four full months on this project. In general, B Company was the outstanding unit at Toul. These men consistently were awarded the Depot Streamer for the guidon by the Toul Depot Commander, after keen competition with residing Ordnance,

Military Police, Supply and Security units. This streak continued unbroken from mid 1956 until B Company left the Depot for quartering at nearby St Jean D'Arc Hospital.

For the entire period, 1956-1958, A Company was involved in construction of Trois Fontaines Army Depot. Valuable experience was gained by building railroad spurs into the Depot. At the same time, C Company was accomplishing similar tasks at Verdun Depot. Additional chores involved refinishing and constructing airstrips in and around Verdun.

It was in this period that helicopter pads began to spring up all over northern France. The tradition of treating orphan children to a Christmas dinner followed by a shower of gifts was also originated in this era. The 97th Engineers were well known to the French people as a "Can Do" outfit "Per Excellence" by this time.

In late 1958, B Company went to Nancy Ordnance depot to construct a large hangar type warehouse. The huge structural steel building measured 75 meters by 120 meters. The concrete footers had to be poured by hand. With the help of heavy equipment of HQ's Company, the project was completed in April 1958 after six long months. The hanger was eventually employed for storage of tanks and maintenance of armor vehicles.

Several notable command changes took place by the end of 1958-early 1959. A typed copy of a 97th Engineer Battalion officer's roster contains the name of three successive commanders: LTC Dale O'Brien, commander as of 1 January 1959; LTC Frank Gaines, commander as of 31 July 1959; and MAJ William F. Crise, who served under these lieutenant colonels. During 1959, MAJ Crise was a member of Headquarters Company, probably as S-3. When LTC William F. Crise received his promotion, he took command of the battalion.

Headquarters Company had relocated to Etain, while the majority of C Company was at Vassincourt in support of Trois-Fontaines Army Depot. A Company had moved to Verdun's "Chicago Area," and D Company was housed at Jean D'Arc hospital while working on the General Depots at both Toul Rozaliers and Nancy.

The new decade was to see the same vigorous production record written by the men of the 97th Engineer Const Battalion. In 1960 a curtain wall consisting of 18,104 square feet of concrete blocks was constructed around three existing storage buildings at Verdun General Depot. This construction permitted the safe storage and protection of sensitive items of signal equipment and required 27 platoon weeks to complete.

Construction of fences, hardstands and three prefab buildings at the Depot Storage site at Graux, Neufchateau, Lempire and Void, France was completed in five platoon weeks. Sanitary facilities for troop billets were constructed at Toul General Depot. In this project, 23 platoon weeks were involved while installing 42 latrines in existing prefab buildings. This required the placing of 17,000 linear feet of water and sewer lines.

Starting on 25 July 1960, 56,151 linear feet of sub-surface fuel lines were installed at the Surplus Commodity Housing at Etain. Heating systems were also provided for the supply point and logistics control center there. The job was finished on 18 November 1960.

The 97th was responsible for the construction of many athletic facilities in 1960. In the summer of 1960, a sprinkler system was installed for a golf course in Combles, France. This golf course served the NCO Clubs at Toul Fontaine Army Depot. A soccer field completed in the spring was dedicated 1 September 1960 by the Mayor of Theirville in a large ceremony. It was named "Fleming Field" after the Commanding General of Advance Sector Communication Zone Europe (ADSEC). In addition to these, four tennis courts at Verdun hospital, two tennis courts at Trois Fontaine Army Depot and the rebuilding of the Sidi Brahim Gymnasium were products of the talented 97th Engineers.

At the close of 1960, six filled prefab buildings were constructed at Trois-Fontaines Army Depot. These were for use as mess halls by local work forces assigned to the Depot and required 132 platoon weeks to erect.

After a brief winter of maintenance before the new construction season set in, on 17 March 1961, drainage and landscaping work began at St Nazzaire troop area. Later in the spring, construction was begun by D Company on the football field and tracks at Trois-Fontaines Army Depot. Company D also had the responsibility for continuous rehabilitation of the road net work in and around Trois Fontaine Army Depot.

The weather conditions were terrible, but the job was completed on time. In conjunction with the French, whom did all the asphalt work; a 3.5-mile section of roads between the two sections of Trois-Fontaines Army Depot was straightened and widened. Starting from the town of Robert E Spain, D Company finished their part of the project at Trois-Fontaines in four months.

For helping hand projects such as these, the battalion received many complements. One came on a document signed by “The Minister De Le Interieur” on 29 September 1961 for “Acts de:Courage et Devouement.” The 97th Engineers had received “Un Medaille De Bronze” from the French Government!

With the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, “OPERATION ROUNDOUT” went into effect in Europe. This promised seriously to curtail normal construction plans in the anticipated buildup of United States forces in the theater. The construction of a 1,000 man TOE type tent camp for troop housing facilities including all utilities was carried out at the Chineon General Depot. The men of eight platoons labored for two months on a 12-hour on – 12 off shift.

At the Saumur Depot, a 500 man TOE type tent camp of a similar kind took 46 platoon weeks to complete. “OPERATION ROUNDOUT” was in full swing.

As soon as men became available work began on the final 11 kilometers of railroad into the Verdun Class V Depot. This spur, known as the Eix-Abancourt-Rozalier Railroad, required 181 platoon weeks to correct the vertical and horizontal alignment that other units had already devoted two years work to in attempting to complete the job. The spur was finished on 18 September 1962.

In the fall of 1961, the battalion reorganized under a new TOE and a new Battalion Commander: **LTC John H. Carlson**. HQ&SVC Company was changed to A Company, with HQ’s as a separate company. The three line companies that were B, C and the new D (**old A Company**). A Company took on 3rd echelon maintenance responsibility without extra capabilities in terms of the necessary training and equipment. The “3rd shop” was built by C Company in 1962. A seven bay maintenance shop with a 30’ x 48’ Quonset hut and an asphalt hardstand was constructed three miles from Battalion and HQ’s Company at Verdun.

At the close of 1961, the 97th Engineer Battalion Const sent a detachment to Bordeaux to support work on off shore loading of tankers in conjunction with *Operation Roundout*.

Christmas, 1961, provides a fine example of the previously mentioned tradition of serving Christmas dinner to orphans. Nearly 100 boys, ages three to 10 years, from Le Mieux Tiercelin Orphanage located near Vitry-le-François attended the festivities on Saturday 16 December 1961. The battalion was able to donate a television set, numerous toys, candy and needed clothing, plus an additional \$2,200 in cash. Seventy-five men, plus one Santa Claus actually took part in conducting the event for the youngsters. No task at all, for the men of the 97th Engineers.

In early 1962 *Operation Roundout* was being reversed. The alerted units were notified to remain in CONUS, and the units in Europe had the task of undoing what preparations they had made. Preparations made by the 97th Engineers for the arrival of the 62nd Engineer Battalion Const proved to be worthless. Equipment originally procured by the 97th Engineers for the 62nd Engineers had to be turned in and extensive campsites had to be broken down.

Three months of work went into constructing the Aircraft Sighting Range at Etain Air Base in 1962. The range was designed and constructed heavily enough for aircraft fire so it could also double as a range for individual weapons training and firing.

A few more cooperative projects got under way in the summer of 1962. The 97th was performing the initial earthwork for the new St Jean D’Arc Church. Another earthwork project was completed for the Thierville playground. In the Trois-Fontaines area, construction continued on an extensive road network in cooperation with the Ponts & Chausees of the Department of the Meuse and Marne.

Construction began in late 1962 on a mammoth aircraft hanger at Brienne-Le-Chateau. Company B took it for one year, and then was relieved by Company C for a year. A 40-ton crane was necessary for the initial structural members.

It was designed to accommodate 4 B-17's. IN addition, construction included a boiler room, generator plant and required utilities. No TDY was ever paid for the three years the men of the 97th worked on this huge project. Ironically, this hanger never housed an airplane. Under a later NATO agreement, it was used solely as a storage facility. It was completed in early 1965.

Twenty-five platoon weeks were expended in the construction and rehabilitation of the sewage facilities at Etain. The existing sewage plant needed rehabilitation and the construction of a lift and settling tank was required.

The construction of on Depot sites at Toul and Nancy required 20 platoon weeks.

As Christmas of 1962 neared, LTC John H. Carlson departed and command of the battalion was assumed by LTC Robert H. Montjoy, who was to serve until September 1963 when LTC Fernand M. Achée took over the 97th Engineers as Commanding Officer. During his command the battalion published a newsletter titled *The Builder*. Only one page of that magazine survives, showing LTC Achée in a few photos with SFC William C. Forrester, Hq. Co.; 1LT Mathew T. Koski and ISG Elwood W. Lindsay, Co. A.; other photos show SSG Louis Schnell and 1LT Peter A. Broms of Co. D, in a pie eating contest, and MAJ Donald R. Aubrey, Bn XO, and SP5 Frederick Mills of Co. A in a Tug of War contest.

In 1963 at Brienne-Le-Chateau, a miscellaneous Army aircraft maintenance facility was constructed. This consisted of a 5,000 square feet concrete block box and shop, installation of aircraft tie-downs and grounding rods, and an 800 square foot carburetor test building to be completed in 30 platoon weeks.

The most unique project of 1963 came early in the year. Beginning on 19 January, the 97th Engineer Battalion Const was called upon to ease a critical water shortage in the city of Verdun and in several housing areas. The extremely cold weather had frozen the existing water supply system. This occurred the same month that the Rhine River froze completely and lakes in Austria frozen over for the first time in two centuries. Supported by the 32nd Group's teams on two each 3,000 gallon water purification sets and with the battalion's own 1,500 gallon pair of purification sets, a make shift water line was broken into the city's system. The unit hauled water into the housing area and to Etain, 17 miles away, by 5,000-gallon tankers. A Company had primary responsibility and toiled around the clock using three shifts in sub-zero weather! This emergency lasted more than six weeks. Another unique demand upon the energetic 97th Engineers, this one more serious than previous ones, but the battalion was equal to the task!

In March 1964 digging began at Verdun on a large pit to be used for ammo burning and rubbish disposal. With most of the facilities of the battalion employed, the 100-meter by 100-meter pit was dug 12 feet deep, with the earth from the cutting placed along the sides; the effective depth soon became 30 feet. As the pit was used, earth was filled on top of the refuse. The entire project lasted four months.

Each spring the battalion could be counted on to join in two diverse activities: flood control and dress parades. 1964 was no exception. With the annual March flooding of the Meuse River, the sand bags of the 97th Engineers were required desperately once again. And each year, when the holidays and Memorial Day came around, the battalion put its best foot forward and off it went in yet another dress parade. The French people knew the 97th could be counted on to help down the floodwaters or celebrate an occasion, and the 97th Engineers were proud to be called to the task.

That summer the battalion travelled to Orleans for a ceremony and three days of field training. All battalion ordnance was employed in the 650-mile motor march to and from the event. Over that entire stretch not one vehicle was dead-lined or engaged in an accident. This was a marvelous tribute to the maintenance sections of the battalion that made such preparedness possible. In fact, throughout the 1963-1964 periods the 97th Engineer

Battalion Const consistently held the lowest deadline rate of any battalion of 32nd Engineer Group (Const), which included the 83rd Engineer Battalion Const at Chinon and the 553rd Engineer Battalion Const at Orleans.

Meanwhile, back on the projects, the extensions of the runway at Rozalier Air Force Base and the taxiway at Toul-Rozalier were proceeding on schedule through the summer. After being pulled back from the complex project at Briey-Le-Chateau, B Company went to Nancy to extend a building and renovate it for use as a depot rebuild assembly line. Later, at Nancy, B Company got involved with the fuel storage problems existing there.

Two other projects carried into 1965. The buildings for NATO personnel at Camp De Loge needed rehabilitation, which lasted for six months. D Company helped to close down the Army Depot at Vassincourt and the Ordnance Depot at Trois-Fontaines. During this time the medical warehouse stores from all French Medical Depots were being moved to Vitry-le-François.

Much more of the quantitative details are known of the major construction efforts since 1964. Despite then nature of the last few projects, namely dismantling certain facilities in France, the 97th Engineer Battalion Const was called upon to add to its rich construction history in France. To load them in this complex effort, in February 1965 LTC William P. Gardiner arrived to command the battalion.

Beginning on 19 April 1965 and lasting until 30 June 1965, Company B was assigned the task of replacing a jet fuel storage facility at Toul Rozalier Air Base. Using concrete slab bases, three tanks were erected with integral pumping capabilities. All piping and loading facilities were also furnished during the 12,041 man-hours and 1,490 equipment hours expended.

Company C started on 4 May 1965 to replace and alter the Aircraft Control Tower at Rozalier Air Base. No prefab structures were employed. The tower housing was designed and built from start to finish. The 97th provided the fabrication and painting of the structure as well as the electrical switchboard, communications, lights and a curved glare-free tinted glass.

In the summer C Company embarked on a yearlong project, which entailed erecting seven prefab buildings for United States Air Force Europe (USAFE) ammo storage at Etain Air Force Base. It turned out to be a big earth moving, road construction project as well. 23,362 man-hours and 6,354 equipment hours were demanded of this large task.

A similar project was handed to Company C on 22 June 1965. This required moving into sub-standard quarters for one year near St Mihiel. One year, 47,003 man hours and 9,446 equipment hours, 19 prefab ammo storage buildings and the accompanying read net appeared where wilderness had flourished for ages.

When the security fence for the General Depot at Nancy required repairs, Company B was sent to the project on 24 June 1965. In five short weeks the three kilometers of old fencing had been removed and sent for salvage, retaining the barbed wire top. The old barbed wire section was employed atop the completely new, deeply rooted security fence.

Another small summer project called for a hardstand for the Rozelien Class V Depot, Verdun. A new drainage system was required for this double surfaced hardstand.

By 1965 the jet strip at HANN Air Force Base had cracked beyond repair. After the call to work, the men of the 97th put in many long hours in trying to break up that top layer of concrete sufficiently to remove it. Once all the square footage of that jet runway had been removed, the new recapping had to be done. By the end of Indian summer, HANN Air Force Base had a brand new runway for jet usage.

Company B embarked on a new venture on 8 July 1965. In a project quite similar to Company C's at Etain during this time, two prefab ammo structure buildings were required, 11,338 man-hours and 2,758 equipment hours were spent before the projects completion on 4 May 1966.

The last large project to be noted started while the unit was based in France and can be considered in this period. Company B split its forces to start another project on 25 September 1965 at Landstuhl, Germany. The

battalion was to construct the Initial Defense Communication Satellite Ground Station (SATCOM) facilities there. LT Ellenbogen was in charge of the endeavor, which eventually demanded 52,636 man hours and 5,919 equipment hours with \$15,000 paid out as per diem before its completion on 4 May 1966.

It is interesting to note that the last significant endeavor completed before FRELOC was a helping hand project for the French. Company D was given the job of extending the parking lot and improving many minor facilities at Fort Dovamont, Verdun, site of the famous WWI battle. During the month of excavation from 14 February 1966 to 11 March 1966, many weapons were turned up appearing almost brand new. It was a veritable gold mine for souvenir hunters – well preserved weapons from WWI! “Est Republicain,” the local newspaper, carries a big account of the acceptance ceremony on 16 March 1966. The 97th Engineer Battalion had again touched the hearts of the people by preparing more adequate facilities in time for the anniversary of the battle, when thousands were expected to come to Verdun.

After 17 months as commanding officer of the eager 97th Engineers, LTC William P. Gardiner was replaced by LTC Harold L. Myron, who then became responsible for the battalion’s FRELOC operations.

[A personal correction from Harry L. Harvey, LTC, Retired: email dated 7-2-2012 [updated 17 November 2013: LTC Harvey died 19 June 2013, Grants Pass, OR]:

“In the section concerning the 97th activities in France I noticed a misstatement near the bottom (of this page): [While] Lt. Col. William P. Gardiner was assigned as commander, I was Battalion XO, with the rank of Major. I assumed command of the Battalion and held that position for five months. I was replaced by Lt. Col. Harold L. Myron, after deactivation of the battalion he commanded in Orleans, France.”

D. M. Ricks, Webmaster]

Although several of the projects, which follow, take place in France, they occurred in conjunction with the relocation of US Army Communication Zone Europe from France (FRELOC) and must be considered with the story of the 97th Engineer Battalion Const in Germany. The story in France must end here with the notification on 1 March 1966 to move out but with it ends the most productive, most glorious period of continued achievement by the many members of the European famous 97th Engineers!

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