

NO TASK TOO GREAT IN GERMANY



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

Updated 7 June 2014, D. M. Ricks

The notification to relocate to Germany came as no surprise to those men of the 97th who had been loading ammunition for months. This was the beginning of the move from France in early 1966. Orders to move came officially in March, but since January, Company A had had an average of 108 men on loading ammunition at Rozalier Depot onto semis. Company B devoted 34,843 man-hours and 3,765 equipment hours in March alone to loading ammunition at Vitry Class V and Rozalier Depots. Company C joined in this task at Trois Fontaines Ammunition Depot loading it for shipment to Vitry, then later at Vitry by truck to Rozalier Depot, all in February 1966.

The French Relocation (FRELOC) began in March when the battalion was ordered to redeploy to Pirmasens, Germany by March 1967. Thus began probably the most turbulent period in the long history of the 97th Engineers. To cover it by summarizing activities chronologically would create confusion commensurate with the difficult year the battalion had. Instead, a recapitulation by company would be preferable. Some of the activities as the one cited above, commenced before March 1966; but all were necessitated by FRELOC.

Company A's major assignments, aside from the normal mission of supporting equipment and direct support maintenance for the battalion, consisted of dismantling a host of prefabricated structures. An average of 31 men worked 31,039 man hours and 7,558 equipment hours to take down buildings at Nancy Depot. The crew consisted exclusively of equipment operators who had not worked on this type of task previously. They went to work on 9 July 1966 to remove five buildings, each 60'x175', which they finished by Christmas time 1966.

The same crew, not so unfamiliar with the task anymore, set about dismantling, packing, and transporting buildings at Laon Air Force Base. This took place during January-February 1967. From this site, the crew moved directly to Chaumont Air Force Base to bring down still more buildings.

At the end of this project, late March 1967, the company received its second officer in time to direct efforts at still another site. Instead of removing buildings however, the mission was to remove 90,000 square feet of Pierced Steel Planking (PSP), which had provided some surfacing at Etain Air Force Base. This operation took 2,000 man hours and 500 equipment hours. Then Company A prepared to report to Pirmasens, Germany.

In April 1966, Company B received the mission of constructing controlled humidity storage buildings at Rhine Ordnance Barracks (ROB) General battalion support was available for the earthwork and construction to put up 10 of the 150'x250' buildings. The company went TDY from Nancy in April 1966 to Kaiserslautern to work on this huge task.

In November 1966, the 1st and 3rd platoons of Company B arrived in Pirmasens to start work on the Open Storage Shed at the General Depot there. The 2nd platoon had departed in October 1966 for Einsiedlerhof. A prefabricated warehouse complex was completed in January 1967. Then the platoon went to Zweibrucken until the end of February for the architectural renovation of S&MA Headquarters there. Afterwards, the entire company was committed to work on the Depot at Pirmasens.

At the beginning of the new construction season, in March 1967, Company B's 1st platoon went back to ROB to continue earthwork and drainage. The 2nd platoon spent April and May at Koeppern landscaping and constructing a drainage system at an ammunition storage site while Company D installed the extensive road network.

The end of the summer, 1967, saw Company B back at Pirmasens working on Sites #3 and #4, and helping on Site #2. From September through November 1967, the 3rd platoon was involved with extending the taxiway at the Army Air Field at Pirmasens. This project entailed excavation and placement of a 2" surface of hot mix asphalt.

Upon the announcement that the battalion would be leaving France, Company C moved from Etain to Verdun to be with Battalion HQ. In April, a project similar to Company B's mission at Koeppern was given to Company C. The construction at Limbach, Germany was completed in May 1967. The two miles of sanitary sewer line required at Koeppern was not called for at Limbach.

In the fall of 1966, the 2nd platoon of Company C went to Landstuhl. There they began work on an 800 square foot unheated warehouse, which was eventually finished 18 days ahead of schedule on 24 December 1966.

This same month, December 1966, Company C began another task at Hohlmuhlbach Train Site. The medical warehouse building there was reconditioned for use by S&MA as a transportable computer center. Completing the project in May 1967, the company put in a lot of hard, long hours to get the job done in an exemplary manner. Their accomplishment was recognized by Engineer Command, Europe, when Company C received the “Outstanding Construction Award” for work at Hohlmuhlbach.

Company C was involved in the most recently completed project. The mess hall at Prum, used by Company A, 293rd Signal Battalion, burned down in June 1967. A complete renovation of the rubble-filled site was required. Receiving the mission in September, Company C set about erecting two prefabricated buildings of the FRELOC era into a T Shape. This modification proved to be very successful. The design and capacity of the new structure was superior to the original mess facility. This project was finished in January 1968 and has been nominated for the “Outstanding Construction Award.”

Reverting back to spring 1966, Company D in May of that year put in 3,973 man hours and 305 equipment hours at Buzy, Essay Maizerais, and Camp Ising, France, to dismantle, package, and transport prefabricated buildings from those sites. These tasks were similar to those assigned to Company A at this time.

Also in May 1966, Company D started their part of the project at Koeppern, Germany. This consisted of constructing the basic load, maximum security, and ammunition storage site for the 57th Ordnance Brigade. The project called for the basic earthwork and compaction, erection of two prefabricated buildings, construction of a road system, erection of light poles, installation of a sanitary system to include a two mile sanitary sewer line, and the construction of guard facilities for the security of the compound. This gigantic mission was completed in fine fashion in October 1967.

A couple of smaller projects were completed by Company D in January 1967. At Azeibrucken, they built a one building grade school for dependents of military personnel. The 1st platoon on 2 January 1967 finished an 80’x100’ warehouse at Muenchweiler.

Another “Outstanding Construction Award” was made for the project begun by Company D in July 1967. Two prefabricated building were constructed end-to-end at Fliegerhorst Kaserne, Hanau, Germany. Earthwork and drainage for the site, installation of metal roofing, an electrical system, and a heating system, as well as interior finishing and construction of sidewalks and steps were part of this all-inclusive project. The facility was opened for use after just three months, in October 1967.

The battalion completed a few helping hand projects for the French people during the hectic FRELOC operations. In the summer of 1966 alone, one soccer field was built at Verdun and a camping and “sports place” was finished at Charny. These were provided by the 97th Engineers solely for French use in August 1966.

After one year of FRELOC, the battalion was again honored for a job well done. Many manpower problems had been overcome by harder and longer work hours. The war in Vietnam had taken its toll on the battalion’s share of supervisory and technically proficient personnel. The outstanding safety record of the period was instrumental in the highly efficient operation the battalion had to maintain. During the six-month period from October 1966 to March 1967, the battalion logged an average of 150,000 miles per month in performing its far-flung missions. In view of the difficulties existing while so much was being done by the men of the battalion, MG R. C. Kyser awarded a “Special Citation for Outstanding Achievement” during FRELOC to the 97th Engineer Battalion (Const) on February 1967.

After 15 months of service, LTC Harold L Myron was succeeded as battalion commander by LTC Albert A Dupont on 28 August 1967. On 15 September 1967, General Orders 60, paragraph 1 (TC 355) 1LT Morgan T. Morris III, S-1, assumed acting command of the 97th EBC. LTC Dupont received his chilly baptism after a three-

month wait. At the end of November 1967, 97th EBC bridge training ended by the tossing Bridge Commander Dupont and Assistant Bridge Commander **LT Mike King**, Company B, into the icy river waters.

This event climaxed another "OPERATON MUDBALL." For 10 days the men of the 97th Engineers mired in the deep mud, just as they had in their reactivation training phases 17 years before. All these events were carefully noted in the new battalion newspaper, "The Constructor." This paper became, in November 1967, the only one published by an individual battalion in the Engineer Command, Europe – another first for the 97th! It had been a long time since the preceding paper, "Chez Nous" had appeared, and the 97th Engineer Battalion (Const) had written a lot of construction history in Europe since then.

LTC Dupont continued in November 1967 the tradition of the Formal Mess reintroduced by LTC Myron in November 1966. This time honored affair was repeated last on 26 January 1968 when the officers of the 97th Engineers, the 24th Engineer Group (Const), the Engineer Command, and the Pirmasens Area were treated to a talk by **COL Kenneth W Kennedy**, the Commanding Officer of the Engineer Command Europe. An enjoyable time was had by all, and the tradition will now be carried back with the battalion to Fort Riley.

Starting in January 1968, the battalion under took a project at Gross-Auheim, Germany. A taskforce taken from the battalion at large and supported by the entire battalion went there to construct a storage facility requiring 26,000 square feet of space. Thus, even while the demands on the battalion's resources created by the impending move back to CONUS are at a peak, the 97th Engineers are called upon to perform their primary mission – Construction!

The main body of the 97th Engineer Battalion (Const) leaves for Fort Riley, KS, on 15 July 1968. The men of the 97th Engineers will have spent 6,080 days in Europe. These days, first in France, then most recently in Germany, have been the most productive the 97th has ever seen. A proud record of achievement stands, as an undeniable example for all to see that "No Task Too Great" is an appropriate motto for the men of the 97th Engineers to bear.

Let Chapter VI reflect a similar willingness and capability to perform in the best traditions of the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army.

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