

8 December 1959

Mr. Jesse A. Remington
Director, Historical Division, OGE
Department of the Army
P. O. Box 1715
Baltimore 3, Maryland

Dear Mr. Remington:

Thank you for your letter of 13 November 1959 acknowledging my comments on Chapter XI of the Engineers in the War Against Germany and your remarks concerning my approach.

I am glad to know that your office has available the 36th after-action reports and the unit history accounts. After reading Chapter XI and failing to find mention of the 36th in connection with the planning for and the Salerno operation, I could only conclude that your people who wrote this Chapter either did not have them, or else that they gave such small credence to them that they decided the reports were not worthy of use.

With reference to my comments on the day-to-day operations of the 36th during the Salerno period, they were based on the 36th historical accounts corrected and supplemented in light of my personal experience. I can appreciate your views as a historian on the soundness of recollections after the passage of a number of years. As you may know, I served in the Judge Advocate General's Corps from 1946 until my retirement in 1956 as The Assistant Judge Advocate General of the Army, and I believe our views as lawyers as to the value of such evidence are somewhat similar to yours as historians. However, from the lawyer's viewpoint greater acceptance is given where the recollections are based upon personal participation in unusual events, with consideration also being given to maturity, caliber and position of the person involved. It was from this standpoint that I wrote.

With particular respect to the history of the 36th, it is my understanding that this was written in Germany after V-E Day by an officer who wasn't personally acquainted with the

operations of the regiment at Salerno who pieced it together on the basis of the best information that he could assemble. Under the circumstances, I think that he did a very commendable job, but there are gaps in the history and also some comments that are misleading or even contrary to my personal knowledge as a participant in the events. In writing the detailed comments it was my purpose to present matters of my personal knowledge as a participant so they might be considered by your Division. In this connection I am enclosing a copy of my Comments on Chapter II with marginal notes on pages 3 - 7 indicating matters which are of my personal knowledge.

I am sorry to have taken so long in getting my comments in on all the chapters, but my job as Assistant to the President of Solar Aircraft Company has kept me quite busy. I hope to have a little free time over the Christmas Season, and will try to get on with my review at that time.

Sincerely,

George W. Gardes
Brig. Gen., USA (Ret.)

GW:am
Enclosure

on The Engineers in the War Against Germany

C H A P T E R X I

GENERAL

The first two sections of this chapter entitled "Preparations for
(SALERNO)
AVALANCHE" and "The Invasion" omit all reference to the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment. Apparently this is one of the blank spots in your records so I will describe briefly the Operations of the 36th Engineers during this period to provide a bit of background for the amplification of these sections by bringing the 36th into the picture in appropriate places. Further information on the 36th Engineers' operations on the Beach-head can be obtained from the text and situation maps appearing in the publication entitled, as I recollect, "Salerno" which was published by the Army Historical Division around 1950.

Turning now to the 36th during the period in question. The regiment had landed in Sicily with the 3rd Infantry Division Task Force and turned in an outstanding performance as will be evidenced by the endorsement to a citation for my Executive Office, Colonel Chubbuck, written by Colonel Caffee (Now Maj. Gen. USA, Ret.)* who commanded the 1st Amphibion Brigade during that operation. A copy of this endorsement is forwarded herewith as enclosure "A". On 18 August 1943 the 36th's operations were scattered through Southern Sicily when it received urgent orders to assemble at Licata for embarkation. On 19 August 1943 it sailed from Licata for Biserte, Africa, where it was assigned to the Fifth Army and attached to VI Corps.

The morale of the 36th was high when it returned to Biserte. As a result of nearly a year's operations in North Africa and Sicily,

*
Now deceased

we had developed a cohesive, close knit, capable organization with a number of very fine Non-Coms. However, it was at reduced strength as a result of losses in Sicily from battle casualties, sickness and injuries. We were over two hundred men under strength and averaged only slightly more than two officers per letter company. In addition to our personnel shortages, much of the organizational equipment was in need of replacement or extensive overhaul as a result of hard usage and casualties from mines, bombing and shell fire on the beaches and during subsequent operations in Sicily.

Our equipment was reasonably well taken care of at Biserte but the personal situation was not. No officer replacements were received. About 200 enlisted replacements arrived a few hours before embarking; however, knowing from experience the chaotic conditions that exist on invasion beaches during an assault, I decided to leave the replacements behind for the follow up and to stick with the veteran team that had come out of Sicily, all of whom had been through the Sicily Assault landing and many had also experienced the Moroccan landing. When we reached Salerno I was happy for this decision as the regiment was landed piece-meal on different beaches amidst the anticipated confusion which was worse, if anything, than what we had experienced in Morocco and Sicily. Despite this, individuals, squads, platoons, and companies who found themselves separated from their larger units searched around for the nearest elements of the regiment and joined up with them with the result that the regiment became an effective operational team in a comparatively short period of time. This result could not have been accomplished nearly as effectively if the units were encumbered with a large number of green men who had not been assimilated into the organization.

The assigned mission of the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment for the Salerno landing was to form part of the infantry reserve for the 36th Division. During D-day (Sept. 9) two companies plus some smaller units (squads and platoons) from other companies were landed and were used as a screen for armor along the Sele river that night. On the night of D-day the remainder of the regiment was ordered ashore.

For sake of clarity I will note below the highlights of the regiments' operations during the ensuing eight days, D+1 to D+8, chronologically day-by-day.

D+1 (September 10). The regiment closed in its assembly area on the morning of D+1. Reconnaissance was made of the blown bridge over the Calore river on Route 18. That evening H Company was assigned to the Rangers for a landing near Analfi with the mission of assisting the Rangers over the beach and then acting as their Combat Engineers. This Company not only gave the Rangers engineer support, but also fought with them as infantry for more than a week and entered Naples with them.

D+2 (September 11). 1) Company A worked on the construction of a by-pass around the blown Route 18 bridge over the Calore.

2) Company B worked on the emergency runway behind the beaches.

3) Companies C and E assisted the 531st Engineer Shore Regiment in the beach operations.

4) Company F worked in the Ammo dump.

5) At about 2100 the 3rd Battalion was given the infantry mission of occupying a position astride Route 18 on a small rise about three miles north of the Sele River.

A battery of 105's was attached to the Battalion for this operation.

D-3 (September 12) 1) The 3rd Battalion (less Company H) with Company D attached launched its attack about 1000 and immediately met strong resistance. Heavy fighting continued throughout the day during which the Germans counterattacked with tanks and infantry, however, by nightfall Company I and a portion of Company G were on the Battalion objective. Company D and the remainder of Company G were on a raise about 400 yards to the rear. Losses during the day had been severe. The battery commander was killed shortly after the attack started. Lt. ^{Nealon} Nelson, I Company Commander, was killed that afternoon. For awhile during the day G Company was commanded by a sergeant. After dark the Germans infiltrated along a creek between the two sections of the 3rd Battalion and cut off the forward body, however, after aggressive patrol action contact between the sections was reestablished about 0200. The fire fight which had continued through the night died down shortly afterwards leaving the 3rd Battalion in possession of their objective.

The objective of the 3rd Battalion which had been thought to be only lightly defended, turned out to be one of the strong points of the German defense system.

2) The 1st Battalion was assigned the task of preparing Sals crossings. They prepared the approaches for the floating bridge over the Sals put in by Company B, 16th Engineers about 300 yards upstream of the blown highway bridge. They also worked on approaches to the Railroad bridge and the preparation of the bridge for vehicle traffic by removing the rails and the addition of ballast.

D+4 (September 13). 1) The 3rd Battalion was relieved by the 141st Infantry at about 0500 and moved to a position west of Route 18 where it took up a new position on the left flank of the 141st. The days activities consisted primarily of organizing its position and patrolling.

2) The 1st Battalion continued work on the Sele crossings.

3) At 2100 the regiment was called on for another battalion for combat. The 2nd Battalion (less Company D) with Company A attached moved out at midnight and took up a position about 2500 yards in length on the high ground along the south bank of the Calore astride the road leading into the beach-head from Altavilla.

D+5 (September 14).

1) The 2nd Battalion position was under heavy artillery fire throughout the day and in the afternoon the Germans launched a tank attack. The Calore was a natural tank barrier and the only way into the position was over a narrow stone bridge and thence up a narrow one way road which angled upwardly across the face of the mountain to a pass whence it dropped down into the Salerno plane. Several hundred yards up the road from the bridge there was a shallow quarry recessed back into the hill from the road. The 2nd Battalion had a 37 mm. and a 50 caliber machine gun located in the quarry and as the lead German tank moved across the quarry opening they both commenced firing at point blank range knocking out the tank which formed a perfect road block against the following German tanks. The remaining German tanks then withdrew under fire from our supporting artillery.

at the bridge

"F" Co.

bridge

2) The 3rd Battalion position was under heavy artillery fire and during the day the Germans launched a tank-infantry attack which over-ran a portion of the I Company position, however, the men stayed in their fox holes and stopped the following infantry while our supporting T.D.'s engaged the German tanks. D Company accounted for one M-IV tank. That night D Company captured a German scout car with three prisoners which wandered into its position. The 3rd Battalion was reinforced by the attachment of Company B, 120th Engineers.

3) Companies B and C laid mines and strung wire in front of 36th Division positions.

D+6 (September 15) 1) The 2nd Battalion position was subject to intermittent artillery fire which became heavy in the afternoon. Late in the afternoon the Germans moved up additional infantry to the North side of the river apparently for an attack and proceeded to detruck them in plain sight of the 2nd Battalion position. They were promptly brought under fire and suffered observed losses. No attack materialized. Patrolling continued active.

2) The 3rd Battalion was subject to intermittent artillery fire. Active patrolling was carried on.

3) Companies B and C continued their field fortification activities for the 36th Division.

D+7 (September 16) 1) The 2nd and 3rd Battalions received intermittent artillery fire. Patrolling continued.

2) Companies B and C continued their field fortification assignments.

D+8 (September 17) 1) The 2nd Battalion was relieved by the 141st Infantry and returned to regimental control.

3) Companies B and C were relieved of their field fortification assignments.

(September 18) 1) The regiment resumed its engineer activities.

2) During the above foregoing activities the advance detachment of H & S Company which landed in the assault constructed 2 railroad prime movers out of 2½ ton GMC's by replacing regular wheels with railroad flat-car wheels - worked quite well.

SPECIFIC

Page 10, line 24. The paragraph beginning on this line might be a good place to start bringing the 36th Engineers into the picture.

Page 13, line 13. Suggest adding reference to 36th Engineers as part of the floating reserve.

Page 24, lines 14-20. Bridging material was not only short, it was practically impossible to get. From the breakout of the beach-head to the end of December during which time the regiment constructed more than 80 bridges and sizable culverts we received only three Baileys. ^{and very little bridging materials from 5th Army} Most of the time we were forced to the expedient of by-passes and low level bridges which were a constant source of trouble during the ever present rains from October on. Recon parties often entered towns and villages on the heels of the assaulting infantry looking for anything usable in the line of timbers and steel beams and we largely got by on the engineer materials that were scrounged from the country-side.

Page 27, lines 10 to 18. We most emphatically did not ignore or under-estimate the danger of sudden floods at the Volturno.

By that time we had the October rains behind us and were aware of the problems but as pointed out above, the materials were not available so we did the best we could with the very limited amount we could get from the 5th Army plus what we scrounged off the country. The fact that the roads and bridges were maintained at all over the Volturno in the Venafro area was a tribute to the skill, determination and ingenuity of the 39th and 36th Engineers. One of the many examples of ingenuity in face of difficult situations was the action of G Company, 36th Engineers who constructed an aerial cableway over the Volturno south of Coli and then took the bed off a 1/4 ton trailer and slung it from snatch blocks mounted on the cable. With this expedient an airborne regimental team isolated on the far side of the river was supplied for several days until a bailey bridge could be secured and put in. As a matter of possible interest there is enclosed as enclosure B two sheets from an operations report ^{of the 36th} based on S-3 notes during this period.

GENERAL. Before closing my remarks on this section I would like to make a brief comment on the Assault river crossing of the Volturno near Lematola by A Company on 12-13 October in support of the 34th Division crossing. It was planned to put in a floating bridge and in anticipation A Company had spent several days rehearsing behind the lines as the bridge was scheduled for the early phase of the ^{assault} support when speed was essential. In addition all available pontoons (the requirement plus nearly 100% spares) were inflated and put on dump trucks to reduce time at the bridge site to a minimum. The Company moved out from a sheltered area about 1/2 mile from the bridge site at about 0800 on Division orders and almost immediately

came under artillery fire. Three trucks were knocked out before they reached the bridge site. Despite this the Company ~~immediately~~ went forward with the bridge construction, however, the pontons ~~were being continuously~~ ^{continued to be} being knocked out until there were not enough left to put the bridge in even if the Germans ceased fire - which they didn't. At this point the Company was ordered back from the site. They were commended by both the Division and Corps Commanders for outstanding bravery and determination - but the moral of the incident to me was that rubber bridges can't be put in under observed fire. As a matter of interest A Company put in an ingenious floating bridge consisting of components of two different types of bridging that night at an unobserved site.