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HEADQUARTERS
60TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APO 35 US ARMY

4 January 1945

SUBJECT: Action Against Enemy, Report After/After Action Report

TO : The Adjutant General, Washington, D. C. (Thru Channels)

Transmitted herewith Action Against Enemy, Report After/After Action Report of this unit for the period 1-31 December 1944.

For the Commanding Officer:

Charles D Meckes
CHARLES D MECKES
1st Lt CE
Adjutant

4 Incls:

- 1 - Journal 60 Engr C Bn 1-31 Dec 44
- 2 - Daily Engr Situation Rpt 60 Engr C Bn 1-31 Dec 44
- 3 - Plans-Electro-Magnetic Road Sweeper
- 4 - Photos

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HEADQUARTERS

60TH ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION
APO 35 c/o Postmaster, New York, NY

ACTION AGAINST ENEMY, REPORTS AFTER/AFTER ACTION REPORTS
1-31 December 1944

At the beginning of this period the battalion was continuing its mission of facilitating the advance of the 35th Infantry Division in its drive toward the Saar River. Key officer personnel consisted of Lt Col Philip Botchin, Commanding (Lt Col Botchin was promoted from the rank of Major to Lt Col on 1 December 1944); Capt Louis H Johnson was Executive Officer; Capt Frank G Rennis, S-3; Capt Charles W Jones, S-2; Capt Robert H Houk, S-4; Capt Robert W Johnston, Assistant Division Engineer; 1st Lt Charles D Meckes, S-1; 1st Lt Charles W Harris, commanding Hq & Serv Co; Capt Tim Mercer, commanding Co A; 1st Lt George W Bond, commanding Co B; and Capt Fred B Waters, Jr, commanding Co C. On 15 December 1944, Major Alexander G Sutton, Jr, was assigned from the 1117th Engineer Combat Group and assigned as Executive Officer; Capt Louis H Johnson was assigned as S-3; Capt Frank G Rennis assigned as CO, Co C; Capt Charles W Jones assigned as CO Co B; and Capt Fred B Waters, Jr, was assigned as S-2. Battalion strength at the beginning of the period was 28 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 593 enlisted men.

At the beginning of this period, the battalion was bivouaced at Erstroff, France. The battalion's primary mission at this time was to facilitate, with road clearance, and engineer works, the advance of the 35th Infantry Division. It was anticipated that, as in the preceeding month, the battalion would encounter numerous mine fields, road blocks, and cratered roads. In most instances, it was planned to bridge these anticipated craters by using either steel treadway or by filling them with rubble.

On 1 December 1944, Co A constructed a class 40 Bailey Bridge, north of Bistroff, over a blown culvert while small elements from companies A and B constructed two culverts and fills south east of Hemering on a cratered road. Co B conducted schools and gave numerous demonstrations on the use of the flame thrower, assault boats, and pole and satchel charges for the 137th Infantry Regiment. The following day, Co A constructed a culvert on the road southeast of Hemering, and all three companies trained in pillbox destruction in preparation for the anticipated "smashing" of the Siegfried Line. Tests were made of the effectiveness of different sized explosive charges on pillboxes of the Maginot Line defenses which were located in the area. The same day, Co A with one platoon Co B attached, was placed in direct support of the 134th Infantry Regiment, and Co C with one platoon Co B attached, was placed in support of the 320th Infantry Regiment. The 1135th Engineer Combat Group remained in direct support of the 35th Infantry Division. A and C Companies were placed in support of their respective regiments to facilitate the assault of the Moderbach River. However, only light, scattered resistance was encountered.

On 3 December 1944, the battalion (-) moved to Petit-Tenquin while Co A constructed two treadway bridges over the river southeast of Puttelange. The following day, the two platoons from Co B which had been attached to Companies A and C, were relieved of attachments. Co A constructed a steel treadway bridge over the Moderbach River northwest of Puttelange while Co C constructed an infantry support raft and a footbridge over the Moderbach River south of Holving, despite accurate, though moderate, artillery fire.

On 5 December 1944, the battalion (-) moved to St Jean Rohrbach. Co A constructed two steel treadway bridges, class 30 and 40, over blown culverts north of Hambach, while

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Co C constructed an infantry support bridge over the Moderbach southwest of Holving. The following day, the battalion (-) moved to Heckenrandsbach. Co A constructed a class 40 treadway bridge over a demolished culvert on the main highway southwest of Sarreguemines. Co B constructed a class 40 Bailey Bridge over a crater southwest of Hambach, while Co C constructed a class 40 treadway bridge at Heckenrandsbach over a demolished culvert and a class 40 Bailey Bridge southeast of Neufgrange. In addition to these tasks during this period, all companies performed daily maintenance and mineclearing of all roads in the division sector. The enemy had made copious use of AT and AP mines, and a number of minefields were removed.

At this point, the division had reached the banks of the Saar River, and plans and extensive reconnaissance was made for suitable crossing sites. South of Sarreguemines, a railroad bridge had been destroyed by the retreating enemy, but a daring reconnaissance by 2d Lt John S Parker, Co A, disclosed that with only minor repairs it could be utilized as a bridge for foot elements of the assaulting infantry. In the division right sector, a suitable assault crossing site was found at Zetting, and further plans for the attack were made.

The 81st Chemical Smoke Generating Company was attached to this battalion to provide the necessary covering smoke for the bridging operations. A Task Force composed of Companies A and B and one company of the 133rd Engineer Combat Battalion was formed and commanded by Capt Louis H Johnson, Battalion Executive Officer, to facilitate the crossing of the assaulting troops in the left sector, while a task force composed of Co C of this battalion and two companies of the 133rd Engineer Combat Battalion, commanded by Lt Col Skeen, 133rd Engineer Combat Battalion Commander, was formed to facilitate the crossing in the division right sector. Assault equipment was assembled in forward assembly areas, as final plans for the assault were completed.

On 8 December 1944, the 134th and 320th Infantry Regiments assaulted the river line abreast. The 134th crossed on the partially demolished railroad bridge without a casualty in the assault, and the 320th "hit" the hostile shore in assault boats. Immediately after the assaulting regiments had crossed the Saar, construction of necessary supporting bridges was begun.

The 81st Chemical Smoke Generating Co occupied the high ground west of Sarreguemines and Remelting, and covered the Sarre River valley with dense clouds of smokes. Companies A and B then constructed a steel treadway bridge over the canal at Sarreinsminding and construction of a Bailey Bridge over the Sarre River was begun at this point and at Sarreguemines by supporting engineers. Bridging in the division right sector at Wittring was notable because while the river was less than 100 feet wide at this point, it required 290 feet of bridging: a 130 ft class 40 Bailey Bridge over the railroad, a 60 ft Bailey Bridge over the canal, and 100 ft Bailey Bridge over the Sarre itself. At Sarreinsminding, treadway was laid over the canal despite direct fire from enemy self-propelled guns on the hostile shore. Under this same fire, a class 40 Bailey Bridge was begun at this site.

Under the partially demolished railway bridge south of Sarreguemines, "Task Force Johnson" opened a class ten bridge over the river and canal. Construction of a bridge in Sarreguemines was postponed until the enemy could be cleared from the city.

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Work on the Bailey Bridge at Sarreinsming was continued for 48 hours despite intense observed artillery fire and numerous casualties. Upon completion, a 160 foot class 40 bridge was opened. Thirteen minutes later, the final bridge at Wittring in the division right sector was opened and the bridgehead was firmly established. Immediately after the opening of these bridges, tanks and tank destroyers crossed to the far shore. The bridge at Sarreinsming was noteworthy in that for the second time in the history of this battalion, bridging operations were lighted by enemy flares. Flares were encountered for the first time while a floating treadway was being constructed over the Moselle River in the vicinity of Grevechamps, France. Because of the heavy, observed, artillery fire on bridging sites during this crossing, numerous counter battery and TOT fires were secured through division artillery and thoroughly covered all possible enemy observation posts. Due to the deep mud of Lorraine, and the inadequate road net in this sector, strict traffic circulation was essential until it was possible to construct a class 70 Bailey Bridge in Sarreguemines which diverted heavy traffic through the city. X

X After the successful crossing of the Sarre, the division pressed forward toward its next objective, the Elies River, last natural barrier in the path to German soil. During this period the battalion had cleared of mines and kept in a constant state of repair, all roads in the division sector between the Sarre and Elies Rivers, filled in numerous craters in roads, and destroyed by the use of demolitions, numerous observation towers which dotted the countryside and which were being used by the enemy to direct artillery fire. Areas suspected of containing mines and explosives were carefully examined and in the basement of a chateau in Sarreguemines, a new type 18-day time delay device was found. The main charge consisted of 2400 pounds of dynamite. The igniter and explosive were concealed in a pile of potatoes and when found, the igniter clock had only two and one-half days left before detonation. This device is small (3" high) so that it can be easily concealed. Consequently, it is recommended that all captured explosives be thoroughly examined before being sent to dumps for reuse. A device may be concealed in the container. X On 12 December 1944, the battalion (-) moved to Sarreinsming, France, where final plans were made for the assault of the Elies River. Each company was in direct support of its respective Regiment for the assault crossing.

The battalion had assembled 986 feet of foot bridge in forward assembly areas, and during the night of 12 December 1944, Co C constructed a footbridge in the vicinity of Elies Ebersing, and one battalion of the 320th Infantry crossed with no enemy opposition. Co B crossed elements of the 137th Infantry in assault boats. The forward assembly area for assault equipage was heavily shelled in this sector and much of the equipage was destroyed or damaged. However, a footbridge was constructed but it was destroyed by enemy artillery fire. Co A ferried one battalion of the 134th across in assault boats and then constructed a footbridge in the vicinity of Frauenberg which was used the following night by another battalion of the 134th Infantry. On the night of 13 December 1944, another battalion of the 320th crossed on the footbridge in their sector while Co B ferried another battalion of the 137th Infantry across. At this point, only 400 odd feet of footbridge remained. The rest had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair by enemy artillery fire.

On 14 December 1944, a class 40 steel treadway bridge was constructed in the vicinity of Frauenberg and heavy supporting weapons were immediately crossed. A profile study of the terrain had been made in the vicinity of Frauenberg, and when all points of observation on the hostile shore had been occupied by our forces, construction of a 100 foot

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class 30 Bailey Bridge, and an alternate infantry support bridge was begun. On the morning of 15 December 1944, both of these bridges were opened for traffic, and tank and tank destroyers immediately crossed to the hostile shore. The same day, Co C constructed an infantry support bridge at Bliesbruck. The following night, Co C despite heavy artillery and mortar fire, constructed a footbridge at Reicheim, Germany, and on the morning of 17 December 1944, supporting engineers completed a floating treadway bridge at this point to firmly support our bridgehead. The 35th Infantry Division was firmly established in Germany.

✓ This battalion had successfully crossed the division over three rivers: the Moderbach, Sarre, and Blies Rivers in a period of eight days. From experiences gained in the assault crossings and the successful assault of the Moselle River, certain conclusions became apparent.

1. For all major bridging operations, i.e., the assault of a river line, an artillery liaison officer should be available to the engineer at the bridge site, and with his knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of friendly and enemy artillery fire, can call for the necessary artillery fires.

2. Profiles of the area in the vicinity of a bridge site should be made prior to attempted construction. It is believed that if bridging is delayed until enemy observation points are occupied by friendly troops, the bridge could be opened for traffic sooner than it would have been if construction had started while the enemy still had observed artillery fire on the site. If it is necessary to construct a bridge before enemy observation is removed, construction should be delayed and all personnel remain away from the site until the hours of darkness. Assembling of equipment, or troops, during daylight hours will allow enemy observers to accurately adjust and register the site before darkness.

3. Assault waves must assault through and over ground which is to be used as a bridge site. If the hostile shore at the bridge has not been cleared by the assaulting forces, sniper fire can delay construction for a considerable number of hours. ✓

On 17 December 1944, the battalion (-) moved to Blies Ebersing and for the next few days all companies were occupied in maintenance of the bridges in the division sector, and further road clearance and repair. On 21 December 1944, the division was relieved in this sector and the battalion received orders to regroup at Hilsprich. Battalion closed in new assembly area at 1700 hours. The following day, the battalion was ordered to move by convoy to Metz. Normal combat team attachments were in effect and one platoon from each company accompanied their respective regiment on the division move. The battalion (-) crossed the IP at Puttelange at 2230 and as we were behind the Army light line, full headlights were used. Enemy airplanes were encountered for the first time since St Lo, that night, and the entire convoy was harassed for about two hours. As soon as it became apparent that enemy aircraft were in the area, all headlights were extinguished, but the roads were heavily strafed by the hostile planes. Because the headlights had been extinguished, the strafing was not accurate and little damage was done. The battalion bivouaced in the Grand Arsenal in Metz, and closed at 222400. The following morning, the combat platoons returned to battalion control. The battalion was assembled for the first time in about a month, and for the next few days, performed extensive maintenance on organic transportation. Full use was made of all Special Service facilities such as motion pictures, USO Clubmobiles and Vaudeville shows. The enlisted men were given every opportunity to cleanse and rehabilitate themselves.

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Having been assigned to the Third United States Army Corps, the division was ordered to the north to check the German counteroffensive. Normal combat team attachments were formed and at 1245 26 December 1944, the Bn (-) left for the northern front. The Bn assembled in bivouac at HABAY-LA-NEUVE, Belgium at 2000 hours where Co B was immediately placed in direct support of the 137th Inf and Co C in direct support of the 320th Inf to facilitate the attack of the division north along the Belgium-Luxembourg border across the Sure and Sufbach Rivers. Co A remained in Bn reserve.

At 0800 hours 27 December 1944, the division attacked to the north and crossed both rivers without opposition. In the 137th sector, Co B constructed two footbridges over the Sufbach river north of TINTANGE, Belgium while in the 320th sector, Co C constructed a footbridge over the Sure River, southwest of BOULAIDE, Belgium. Immediately after the assaulting troops had crossed the Sufbach River in the 137th sector, Co B constructed a Class 40 treadway bridge at the same site and supporting weapons and tanks crossed immediately. The same day the Bn (-) moved to BILSDORF, Luxembourg and Co A was placed in direct support of the 134th Inf Regt. Supporting engineers constructed two Bailey bridges over the Sure River to strengthen the bridgehead. A Class 40 on the north-south road between ARSDORF and BOULAIDE and a Class 40 southwest of BOULAIDE were constructed when Co C had constructed the footbridges.

Because of heavy snow in this sector, it became necessary to form ice patrols on all important roads in the division sector and to haul sand to cover all icy spots.

Stiff enemy resistance was now being encountered by our infantry and as a precautionary measure in the event of a large scale mechanized attack all bridges over the Sure river were wired for demolition and numerous anti-tank minefields were laid.

Upon order from Hq Third United States Army, this battalion reorganized on 15 December 1944 under T/O and E's 5-15; 5-16 and 5-17 dated 13 March 1944 as amended by Change 1 dated 2 August 1944. Very little change in personnel was necessary and requisitions were submitted for new equipment authorized.

During this period four Silver Stars and Five Bronze Star Medals were awarded to officers and men of the battalion. General Order 55, Hq 35th Inf Div dated 5 Dec 44 awarded the Silver Star to Sgt Billy J Johnson, Co C, for heroic action in the Forêt de Château Salins in November 1944. Sgt Johnson is now hospitalized for wounds received in this action. General Order 57, Hq 35th Inf Div dated 18 Dec 44 awarded the Silver Star to Capt Elwyn W Smith, Co B, for gallantry in action during the bridging of the Seille River near JALLAUCOURT, France. Hospitalization from wounds received in this action have made presentation impossible. S/Sgt Harold Dean Miller, Co A, was awarded the Silver Star for heroic action in evacuating Capt Smith after he was seriously wounded near JALLAUCOURT, France. Presentation was made at a formal ceremony at FOLPERSVILLER, France, 18 Dec 44. This same order awarded the Bronze Star to Cpl Joseph San Antonio for heroism in assisting Sgt Miller in Capt Smith's evacuation. Presentation was made at the same ceremony. General Order 54, Hq 35th Inf Div dated 23 Nov 44 awarded the Bronze Star to Tec 4 Salvatore Tortora, Co C, for gallantry in action in the Forêt De Château Salins. Formal presentation was made 1 Dec 44 at ERSTROFF, France. General Order 57, Hq 35th Inf Div, dated 18 Dec 44 awarded the Bronze Star to Tec 5 James A Williams, Co B, for meritorious service from 10 July to 8 Dec 44. Formal presentation was made at HILSPRICH, France on

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22 Dec 44. At a formal ceremony at METZ, France on 26 Dec 44 the Silver Star was presented to Tec 5 Harry P Rahn, Med Det and Bronze Stars to Pfc Louis J Yasparro, Co A, and Pvt Edwin J McIntyre, Co B. General Order 46, Hq 35th Inf Div, dated 23 Oct 44, was the authority for Tec 5 Rahn's award for heroism at a mine explosion at AJONCOURT, France in October 1944 and General Order 13, same Hq dated 4 Aug 44 for heroism at Hill 122 near St Lo, Normandy, France. All three men had recently returned to their units after hospitalization as a result of wounds incurred in these actions.

This battalion lost during the month of December First Lieutenant Paul B Shamhart, Jr, Second Lieutenant Charles Swetz, and S/ Sgt Harold Dean Miller. This loss was keenly felt by the officers and men of the unit and these three sterling leaders of men will be hard to replace. Lt Shamhart, a platoon commander, Co C, was killed by an "S" mine while evacuating one of his men who had been seriously wounded. Lt Shamhart braved a savage artillery barrage and knowingly passed through a thickly sown anti-personnel minefield in an effort to remove the wounded soldier to safety. Lt Swetz, platoon commander, Co B, was seriously wounded when his jeep exploded an enemy mine while on reconnaissance. S/Sgt Miller, a platoon sergeant of Co A who had been previously awarded both the Bronze Star and Silver Star for gallantry and heroism, was killed by an enemy patrol while on a night reconnaissance preparatory to laying a friendly minefield.

Warrant Officer Junior Grade George O Huff, Hq and Serv Co, Battalion Automotive Officer, foreseeing the serious jeopardy to motorized warfare caused by the high tire mortality rate in forward combat zones, on his own initiative with much creative imagination and technical skill, designed and constructed an electro-magnetic road sweeping device to be used to sweep the large quantities of shell fragments, splinters and other metal from the roads and towns in heavily shelled areas. The use of this device reduced the number of flats incurred by this unit by fifty percent and the number of tires salvaged twenty-five percent. It is believed that this device may prove to be of inestimable value through the theater.

Total casualties for the period were one officer and six enlisted men killed; two officers and thirty-four enlisted men wounded; two enlisted men missing in action and fifty-six non-battle casualties. Total strength at close of period was 26 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 555 enlisted men. Prisoners captured: Two.

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Typical type of roadblock encountered
by 60th Engr. Combat Bn during
December 1944.

Vicinity of Bliesbruck, France

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Typical type of roadblock
encountered by 60th Engr.
Combat Bn during Dec. 1944.