

"BRIEF NARRATIVE OF THE OPERATIONS OF 2D BATTALION, 117TH ENGINEER
REGIMENT, DURING WORLD WAR. (1917 TO 1919.)

(By Wallace A. Mason, late Major, 2d Battalion, 117th Engineers).

"The Second Battalion was comprised of Companies D from Sacramento and E and F from Los Angeles. In the California National Guard these organizations were known as Companies A, B, and C, 1st Battalion Engineers. This battalion, prior to an Eastern movement, was employed in constructing camps at Camps Fremont and Kearney, and, at various dates throughout September, 1917, started an Eastern movement, arriving in Camp Mills on the sixth and seventh of September, 1917, that being the first time that the battalion was assembled as a unit. We remained in Camp Mills until the eighteenth of October, the time being spent in intensive training, principally close-order drill.

On the 18th of October, 1917, we sailed for France on the U.S.S. "Covington," arriving in St. Nazaire on November 1. We remained on the boat five days, entraining on November 5th for some point in France, and arrived at Mauvage on the 8th of November, and were billeted in the homes and hay lofts of the villagers. This being the first time our troops were billeted in this manner, it was quite a novel experience at first. The weather at this time of the year was cold and disagreeable, and considerable sickness, due to colds made it very inconvenient for a while, but we soon became acclimated and nothing serious developed.

On the 24th of November the majority of the officers left for the First Corps School at Gondrecourt, remaining until the thirtieth of December, 1917. Officers from all branches of the service were there, but it was mostly an Infantry-Engineer school. The organization moved from Mauvage to Chalindrey on the twenty-sixth of December, where it was joined by the officers returning from school. This latter town was in what was known as the 7th Divisional Area, and we were there on barrack construction, making ready for the incoming troops. It was here that we came in contact with the French lines of communication troops.

On the twenty-seventh day of January, 1918, I took half of D Company, which I commanded at that time, and went to Chaumont, General Pershing's headquarters, on barrack and camp construction, remaining there until the 16th of February, when we rejoined the regiment again at Chalindrey at 4 a.m. on February 14 and entrained at Langres, arriving at Moyon at 6 a.m. on February 20.

We marched from Moyon to Habainville and went into the line on the twenty-second of February under French command, attached to the 167th French Infantry. We stayed in line continuously thereafter until the eighteenth of June. During this period we picked up matters of modern warfare that were invaluable, as we learned in the campaigns that followed, and I consider this battalion, and the 7th Division, to which we were attached, as most fortunate in being able to spend so much time in a semi-active sector, which, however, became quite active at times, the officers and men becoming accustomed to shell and gas attacks, both shell and projector. We spent long days at hard work throughout our entire period in this, the Baccarat Sector, and I consider this, alone, made us physically fit to undertake the hard campaigns which followed soon thereafter.

We left Vacquerville for the rear on June 18, and marched to St. Benoit, then to St. Helene, thence to Thaon, where we entrained June 24, arriving at Coolus June 25, and marched twenty-two kilometers to Hablaincourt.

We marched out of Hablaincourt on June 28 to L'Peine, a distance of thirty kilometers. While here we rehearsed a problem of an attack we were to make west of Rheims, but this was suddenly called off, and we marched into line in front of Suippes on the night of July 4, arriving there at daybreak on July 5. Here we noticed great preparations for a counter to the pending German attack. We worked day and night on the trenches of the second position, getting them in readiness, and all units were informed that they must dig in for their self-preservation. Everyone seemed to realize, including officers and men, that a heavy attack was pending, but no one seemed to doubt but that we were perfectly safe from any deep penetration on the part of the enemy. The front line units (French) made one raid every night, and sometimes two a night, and gained most valuable information. Word was passed down as to the exact hour the bombardment would open up. Never before had the organization been upon the receiving end of a more violent

artillery action, D and E Companies stood to as Reserve Infantry with the 84th Brigade, and F Company in reserve to the same brigade.

During the day of July 15, 1918, moving out as a battalion to the left of the Divisional Sector, we joined the First Battalion, taking up our position as Reserve Infantry, as a regiment, in the vicinity of Jonchrey Farm, relieving the 165th New York Infantry. During this action D Company was the first to receive any casualties, it losing, in killed and wounded, about 14 per cent from enemy shell fire. This was on the night of July 14 and the morning of the 15th. While in the Jonchrey Farm section F Company stood to as Infantry, and D and E Companies in reserve. We received at this time considerable annoyance from gas shells, but suffered no serious casualties. We moved out of this position at midnight July 18, arriving at Cuperly at 5 a.m. on the nineteenth, remaining in this town until the twenty-third of July, when we entrained for Chateau Thierry.

Arrived at Trilport on July 24, and marched to Trancrow, where we were billeted for the night. We moved out of this place on July 25, by truck train, to the north of Chateau Thierry, and went into position in the Forêt-de-Fère as Reserve Infantry, following up the advance to the Vesle River. We were relieved here and brought back to Forc-on-Tardenois on August 5. While in Forêt-de-Fère we acted as Infantry and Engineers. We sent reconnaissance parties along the Ourcq River, getting information for the Division in general, and threw bridges across the Ourcq for light artillery, this being done under shell fire. The bridge party from F Company, while putting a bridge in front of Sergy, was fired upon and almost wiped out, three of four being killed and the rest wounded.

We moved out of Forc-on-Tardenois toward the rear and arrived at Dompnin August 13, remaining in this latter town until August 19th, when we marched to Chateau Thierry and entrained, arriving in Brainville August 20th. We remained at this point, in training, until August 28, when we started on our march to the Toul Sector. The commander of E Company, Capt. Wade, and myself preceded the battalion on the line by three days, the organization arriving on September 11th and going into the attack on the morning of the 12th. D and E Companies sent one platoon each with the 167th and 168th Regiments of Infantry to cut wire at the head of the attacking party, one platoon each with the small French tanks and two platoons with the artillery sniping batteries, F Company being in reserve in line of communication work. Great preparations were made for the attack at a jump-off point, as the Infantry troops would come into the line at midnight prior to the attack. Trails were cut through the woods for a quarter of a kilometer, and smooth wire put on both sides for guides with illuminated signs, in large letters, at the entrances to these trails, luminous paint being used for this purpose. This, the St. Mihiel Offensive, started on the 12th of September, zero hour, 5 o'clock, the bombardment starting at 1 o'clock. At midnight of September 11 a terrible rainstorm started and continued throughout the night until the zero hour, but stopped soon thereafter, and broke out into a wonderful day. All of us were of the opinion that we would meet with a stubborn resistance, and little did anyone think, on the morning that we "went over", that our objective would be reached so easily. The attacking units were a very wonderful sight, three distinct Infantry waves, the tanks and sniping batteries following in support, and, about an hour afterwards, the prisoners coming back. The men went into this action with a vigor and purpose unrivaled by any troops, and I want to pay great tribute to the Engineer soldiers. When their work was accomplished as Engineers, after getting through the wire, they fought with the infantry in reducing machine-gun nests, taking many prisoners.

Our objective took us to a line drawn through St. Benoit and known as the Essey-Pannes Sector, which line we held until the first of October, when we moved to the immediate rear and entrained on an Indo-Chino truck train, arriving at Souilly, then Advanced Army Headquarters, on October 2, remaining there until October 4, when we started our march to the Argonne, arriving at Bois-de-Montfaucon, where we stayed until the eleventh of October, when we moved to Baulney, relieving the First Engineers at this point.

On October 12, 1918, we moved to Carpenetry. On October 14 we moved out at 3 a.m. into an attack, in Reserve to the 84th Infantry Brigade, arriving at Exermont on the same afternoon. A portion of F Company preceded the 168th Infantry in this attack, in which they received many casualties. The rest of the organization stood in Infantry Reserve. The battalion stayed in the vicinity of Exermont until the 2d of November on the organization of a position

in front of Landres St. Georges. On November 2, D Company moved out with the 84th Brigade along the left flank of the Divisional Sector, and the rest of the regiment followed up as Engineers. This drive was the one that landed the Division in front of Sedan, at which point we arrived on the afternoon of November 7th.

Our troops were engaged in reconnaissance work ahead of the Infantry along the Meuse River, and, on the evening of November 8, we threw a foot-bridge across the Meuse in front of Remilly. Received order on November 9th to move to the rear. We marched to Les Petit Armoises.

On November 10 we moved to Bar-sur-Buzancy. We were at this point on November 11, when we heard unconfirmed rumors that the armistice had been signed. On the 12th of November we received confirmation of the report, and also learned that we were to be a part of the Army of Occupation. Left Bar-sur-Buzancy November 14, and camped at Landreville.

On November 16 we marched out of Landreville via Landres St. Georges, Sommerance and Romange, camping in the woods just east of Bantheville. Left next morning, November 17, and camped at Brecheville. Here we met the first liberated Allied prisoners, among them being French, English and American. Left Brecheville on November 20 and camped at Juevigny. Here we met other Allied prisoners, who showed signs of terrible mistreatment and looked very much emaciated.

Left Juevigny on November 21, marching via Montmedy to Ecouvieuz. This was the last town in France, being two kilometers from the Belgian frontier and a large German ammunition dump. On November 22d we moved to Chatillon via Virton, Belmont and St. Leger, passing the Belgian frontier at 8:20 a.m. On November 23 we moved out and camped at Elvango-les-Beckwith, this town being in Luxembourg, passing the boundary of Belgium at 11:45 a.m. We camped in this town, policing up equipment and drilling, until December 1, when we moved out and camped at Brouch.

Moved out of Brouch on December 2, 1918, and marched to Heffingen. Left Heffingen on December 3, and marched to Bollendorf, arriving there at 2:50 p.m., crossing the Sauer River, which is the boundary line between Luxembourg and Germany at this point. We were two days behind the German army in accordance with the terms of the armistice. We camped in this town until the 5th of December, when I moved out with D Company to Messerich, to guard a piece of railroad over which the Division was moving its supplies between Trier and Bitburg. The rest of the regiment moved on into Germany with the Division, behind the German army, their line of march being as follows:

Bollendorf	on December 3;
Oberweiss	on December 5;
Reuland	on December 6;
Schwirzheim	on December 7;
Feusdorf	on December 8;
Dorsel	on December 9;
Bruck	on December 14;
Mayschoss	on December 15;

D Company stayed in Messerich, on this railroad guard, until the 18th of December, when we moved out by train at 11 a.m., arriving in Matschoss at 3 p.m., where we joined the rest of the regiment. The wagon train was sent overland, and did not arrive until a week later. We camped in this town during our period of occupation in Germany where the regiment was engaged in barrack and stable construction and maneuver problems.

Left Mayschoss on April 10, 1919, entraining at Oberwinter on the Rhein, for our trip to Brest. Arrived at Brest on April 13, and marched to Camp Pontanenzan.

Left Brest on April 16, and boarded the U.S.S. "Pueblo", homeward bound, arriving in New York on the twenty-eighth of April, and camped at Camp Merritt, N.Y., where the Division was broken up into detachments and sent to the respective rendezvous.

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All of the headquarters company of the regiment went to South Carolina, and the detachments of 2d Battalion to Camp Kearney and the Presidio of San Francisco.

We left Camp Merritt on May 10, arriving in San Francisco about seven days later, where we were discharged from the service of the United States, and there ending the service and designation of the 2d Battalion, 117th Engineer Regiment."