

COMPANY "A"

**371st ENGINEER CONSTRUCTION BATTALION
CAMP ELLIS, ILLINOIS**

**Saturday, 1 February, 1944
Ernest C. Allen**

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Saturday, 1 February 1944

Telephone conversations and orders arriving from the office of the Commanding General of the 6th Service Command confirmed previous reports, and added finality to the organization of the 371st Engineer Construction Battalion. These orders and instructions were received and confirmed officially on the 3rd of February 1944. Company "A" 371st Engineer Construction Battalion, had been redesignated from Company "A" 371st Engineer General Service Regiment according to General Order number 22, and other elements of the old Regiment were likewise designated as part of the new Battalion making a group of four Companies; "A", "B", "C", and HQ. under the command, temporarily, of Col. Adcock.

With such radical changes now in effect, readjustments in many ways, both general and individual were immediately started, though not immediately noticeable to the enlisted men. The new platoon was formed differently. The company was made up of four platoons, including this time a headquarters platoon, and each platoon itself had a headquarters squad. There were many specialist ratings to be filled, more elaborate equipment than had been assigned a General Service Regiment, and the new Table of Organization presented many complex problems in personnel. Hence, from this point on there would inevitably be an influx of new men, and transfer and reassignment of others.

Now as Company "A" begins its reorganization, new officers are immediately assigned to command it. New assignments were made, but, for the moment, some of the old leaders remain to help make the changes over, come more easily. And for reasons such as this the company seemed overrun with officers for the moment. Of the Company "A" Regimental Command, Lieutenants Weinstein and Schuster were held over and assigned to us. Most of the enlisted men also remained at least for the time being, and, here is a roster of the officers and enlisted men joined and assigned officially in the new Company the day of February 1st.

ROSTER

As yet the men themselves were actually little disturbed, for, at this early date the changes were orderly room business. The mess hall continued to provide its three meals with Sergeant Rhoads sticking his head out the side door to suggest his irate patrons have patience for chow was yet 20 minutes off. Sergeant White went on devoting his attentions to the more immediate problems to confront him in the supply room, deflecting each from his path aptly as ever. In general the individual interests were in mail call, now being held at a newly installed window in one end of the supply room, and in the possibility of a pass to Peoria. There was also talk of a trip in the near future to Starved Rock State Park for our turn at bridge building which would last about a week. Not a pleasant piece of training to contemplate this time of the year. Miserably cold weather had fallen over Camp Ellis and promised no let up.

February the third, of course, is recorded as the day on which official confirmations were final as to the state of our new organization. The reverse course in procedure may have been confusing but it is vouched for as proper and looked upon as a normal condition in the army. Rumors and speculation on the battalion's founding ceased after today in the acceptance of what was now fact. In general everyone felt happy about the new order of things, and besides there was the prospect of getting out of the organization altogether, in view of the juggling of personnel, which was to come. This was the favorite hope harbored by the restless and those who felt the Engineers had never quite recognized their true ability and, moreover, had fallen apart as a well organized unit of the Armed Forces long ago. There were others, who, satisfied, looked within Battalion confines for their brighter future. Perhaps wiser to the old adage involving pastures, they saw the possibility of a better job, and not to be forgotten, rank, in a battalion where specialist rating were many. So, with the two larger groups of men equally justified in their hopes, and with the small number, who seemed indifferent to any changes in their army career, striking a usual middle-of-the-road enthusiasm, the Company was enjoying high morale.

The men of 1306 had by now stirred the growing talk of Starved Rock by appearing in the local P.X. garbed in the Army's new arctic

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clothing. They paraded the Parka Coat and hood, white lined for camouflage in snow, warm indeed with their heavy fleecy liners. Beside the hooded coat, not the least admired and beamed upon, were high field boots, water proofed and lined with heavy sock liners, close woven gabardine trousers, mittens, heavy field jackets, and sleeping bags. There were other lesser accessories including heavy winter drawers.

The picture of Starved Rock took on the color of the great Northwest. The day was eagerly awaited when Company "A" could gaze at itself in such desirable toggerry. The day came and the big crates were opened, and every man with a spark of adventure beamed as he tried them on, rapt in a Jack London dream. After trying his outfit on, he then packed it away for the 7th day of February, the day now set as the beginning of our first important training program, Bridge building across the Rock River in Illinois' Starved Rock State Park.

STARVED ROCK STATE PARK

The weather was cold, as was to be expected in Ellis. The trip was too long.

Barracks bags had to be packed, men had to bundle themselves in their new arctics. Full field packs had to be rolled, and to be sure of ample time to accomplish these preliminaries the whistle blew at 0330 that morning. Long after chow and about the time the sun begins to rise in the winter months, the barracks were emptied and locked. The area was quiet again as though asleep, and the men were in formation on 26th Street strapped into their full field packs, rifle on shoulder and barracks bag at one side. In such garb with rifle and bag a man was hardly mobile. After patience became strained trucks were finally loaded with bags, and each man then undertook the athletic task of scaling the end gate of a truck.

They were then soon off, to the relief of all. They drove through Peoria and many saw the city for the first time in daylight. The convoy moved smoothly with occasional halts for the chance to stretch or otherwise gain physical relief. They stopped for lunch at noon, and ate what remained of the sandwiches they were given at breakfast to be carried along for this specific purpose. It was interesting to watch

the beggars approach the thrifty, their stories sad, but the effort of telling them wasted. A little past 2 o'clock we entered the State Park. Some of the men in the advance party, hands in pockets, were there to greet us. There appeared the square black tarpaper hutments once used by the C.C.C., and none betrayed the abuse of their years of service. After circling these huts, as a dog, bedding himself in tall grass, the trucks stopped, unloaded and the men were assigned quarters among the two long rows of huts. First by company, then by platoon.

A race followed for the choice locations and a scramble to tie in with compatible shack partners. It was a busy afternoon installing cots, building fires and hauling in barracks bags. The shrewd men stored in an adequate supply of coal, for, though the afternoon had become bright and sunny, it could not last and seemed to bear warning of snow and extreme weather to come. The huts promised to leak February's fiercest blasts from every window, door and gaping crack in the wall. The question of the hour—where were to be found wine, women and song? An important enough question to warrant loud conversations from the open ends of trucks before they stopped rolling. Through the afternoon, at odd moments, men of the advanced party were cornered and quizzed more thoroughly on the subject. Chow was had at the usual evening hour and many hied themselves off to the Rosebowl, Kelley's and sundry other spots in LaSalle.

Tomorrow morning bright and early would start the first problems on spanning Rock river. It was promised when the days schedule was completed the men might have whatever remained of the day to themselves, excepting those unfortunate enough to be placed on guard or K. P.

Down at the Army Floating Bridge area on the steep clay banks of Rock river and within clear view of the legendary Rock itself, were piles of equipment. Many different kinds for many different uses. The men were to build those bridges, ferries and rafts, not use them, but tear them down as soon as they were completed and inspected. The company was, on the smaller jobs, divided into platoons, and each worked at its particular assignment while the others drilled at theirs, but were brought together as a complete unit to undertake the large 20 ton bridge laid on infantry landing barges. It is impossible to

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cover the individual squads and platoons on their particular days work, but here, following, is a list of problems to be taken in by every platoon and squad during the weeks training. Lighter assignments were of course combined to make a days work.

LISTS

- 10 ton raft
- Infantry support raft bridge (single and double)
- 20 ton landing raft
- 10 ton bridge (pontoon)
- 20 ton bridge (steel landing barge)
- Infantry support night crossings
- Handling of barges for infantry landing.

The 10 ton pontoon bridge was built on two different occasions by the company, and presented a clean days work which could and was finished early, allowing a long evening including part of the afternoon

When morning came on this first day of work, the bugle sounded the warning with its ugly blasts. The band bolsters their spirits as men groped about to unzip the open end of their sleeping bags. Fully as cold as the men who broke from their covers, the bandmen stood shivering, with horns to mouths and lips too near frozen to blow sound notes. They whimsically played "Whistle While you Work" and whiffed just enough notes to add zest to the whimsy. Morning formations were early. Seemingly far earlier than necessary, for we often reached the bridge area before dawn had made it light enough to work. It was the habit to fall in ranks after chow and march to the bridge area behind the band, again wailing ironically its favorite ditty. Rifle on shoulder, Parka hood drawn tight, the men went merrily after them, happy with thought of the coming evening in La Salle.

The band was not only there to bid the men good morning, as it had done for so many jolly trips past the theater in Ellis, but was there when they returned to boost their tired bodies at the end of each hard day's work. They stood retreat, curiously considered a morale builder, perhaps, but there were those who challenged its worth at a time like this.

The company was split this first day, and was kept busy on small problems. Snow fell in the night of February the 8th, and tired men

turned out early on the 9th to track its smooth fresh blanket. This was the day they undertook the 10 ton pontoon bridge, and toward noon snow was falling heavily slowing the work. The company, working together now, finished the job in late afternoon, having put it up and taken it down.

The weather was fast becoming bitterly cold. The stoves were efficient enough while being watched, but through the day and for La Salle visitors there was naught but a sub-zero hut, and, those who stayed in fared little better, for soon after they fell asleep the fires burned out. It was cold.

The day's drill included such as Infantry support rafts and training in how to handle the large steel landing barges. Ice was forming rapidly in spite of the river's current and promised to make such problems as the Infantry support bridge difficult for the next day.

Men were becoming well acquainted in neighboring towns, particularly La Salle. The U.S.O. gave a dance for the men, but, just as important, they served the best pie, cake, sandwiches and coffee they had tasted in many months, and served them every evening.

On February 11, having been forewarned the previous evening of the drudgery ahead so that the wise might get to bed at a reasonable hour, the company joined together for the most dreaded problem of the week's training, the 20 ton bridge. This time they worked with no hope of finishing early. Instead of fighting for a chance to sit at the Rose Bowl's bar, they fought to subtract time from the hours at night they were certain to work, even with their best efforts. It was still bitter cold, and the snow covered banks were becoming slick where travel was most necessary. The balk for the long spans between barges was back-breaking, and there never seemed to be an end to the number needed. Chess for flooring was equally burdening. Hours of walking the ever lengthening circle, from the neat piles of tailored timbers to the point of construction on the bridge, seemed to never end. Crews stood knee deep in icy water erecting abutments and placing transomes. It was a joyful sight to see another span of barges swing into place. When curbings and clamps were all screwed

tight the job of erection was finished. Pictures were taken, as is usually done when a bridge is complete, and inspections were made.

Men jumped to life anew when the signal was given to disassemble the bridge, though body and limb were aching. The arctic clothing was none too warm in the teeth of February's biting blast. Several men fell in the water through ice sheets, and emerged in ice stiff clothing.

With the completion of the 20 ton bridge the weeks work was near over and to the joy of all; most everyone was planning a big Saturday evening in La Salle. A few had planned evenings with the belles of their weeks acquaintance, but the majority counted solely on free-lancing among the beauties on hand at their choice bar.

This Saturday the 10 ton bridge was erected on rubber pontoons for the second time with the company working together as before. This time, though no records were smashed, the assignment was completed in less time than previously, and, considering the weather conditions, it was a record to be proud of. The men stayed on the site until finished, having to delay noon chow less than an hour.

There was retreat for those caught in the area and La Salle for everyone in the evening.

The big evening came and slipped too rapidly away.

Training in floating bridges for Company "A" had come to an end. Not an extensive training but a lot had been learned. Certainly no man was left ignorant of the problem likely to confront him some later day. Though none felt capable of the direction of details or felt he was thoroughly versed, he did have a good general knowledge and could easily fall into the job under competent leaders.

The trip back to Ellis got a late start. The weather remained bitter and the drafty trucks were much colder than on the relatively warmer trip down. Men were stiff and miserable with cold when they reached the company area at Ellis, about 1830. It was more comfortable to remember than to experience. There was a bit of reminiscing of the past week in the mess-hall over a cup or two of coffee before going to bed in those downy warm bunks so recently despised. The girls of La Salle had become famous. Many promised to write and did.

Our prisoner (one of our own men) while at Starved Rock, escaped

from one of the trucks, and provided a bit of entertainment on the trip back. His escape was not wholly successful for one of the officers tracked him down. He was later turned over to the prison stockade, and, after further examination, given a Section 8 discharge.

MANEUVERS

While, back at Rock River other troops were no doubt preparing to span its widths, Company "A" was glad to call it a memory, but, as the Company returned, a new adventure was being whispered, another chance to try the warmth of the arctic clothing,--Maneuvers, near the Kentucky border. The men plyed themselves reluctantly to a spasmodic repeat of old regimental schedules, particularly planned for those who missed some part of training. Most important now was a successful study of personnel and a last revision of the company's Table of Organization. Between the two main problems, bridge building at Starved Rock and maneuvers, and, following the latter' til the last of Camp Ellis days, were a continuous series of schools, lectures and movies, besides the repeats of training. Schools, which had been lagging in second place in importance, began steadily to take the lead, encouraged mainly by the necessity of settling Table of Organization requirements. The school programs were thus soon in full sway, topping priorities in training, and the lists that appeared on the bulletin board were watched eagerly for many reasons. In some instances, because they were a step toward a rating.

As children some men had played with electric trains and erector sets. Some had watched the Chicago subway progress from sidewalks, others had actually handled saws and hammers. It was a problem then to decide which would make the best stone mason and which the best jack-hammer operator. The problem presented was a difficult one, but two or three weeks should breach the gap between the extremes of knowing nothing, and knowing something. The breach between a house painter and sign painter is surely not so great considering they both work with brush and paint.

But there were other men, though they were in the minority, who gave less headache. These were the old Army men who by now surely knew the army way, and that group of men who had pleased civilian contractors throughout the country, some of whom had journeyed beyond

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continental limits and learned their trade thoroughly through years of experience. There were one or two found even to have had well established contracting business of their own. The school schedules were short, perhaps through necessity, an insult to the tradesman and of little value to the novice who thought of the classes as a "good deal."

While schools were forming, and directly after the return from bridge building, there was a week of lectures. Barracks became lecture halls, for the newly completed lecture hall itself had become a barracks almost the day of its completion. Bunks were pushed back in one end of each building, and the few remaining in the way were broken down into single beds and turned across the cleared half of the barracks to be used as seats for the class. The arrangement made for family like gatherings, each barracks being the home of its own platoon and subsequently its own class. Such subjects as Malaria Control, First Aid, Map Reading, and the nomenclature of fire arms in general were reviewed, with the platoon's officer directing the lecture. Later as the classes progressed, sergeant's and even corporals instructed.

At the end of each hour there were 10 minute breaks in the study, during which some men restored to wrestling matches to ease mental strain while others went right on sleeping. However, classes held in the comparative comfort of the barracks seemed to be much more effective than the way in which they were first held. During the first winter months of training such discussions took place in the out-of-doors, cold as a January blast could make it. Men huddled then in squads, with squad leaders to conduct the lesson who had naught but a bare knowledge of the subject and not even a manual to guide him. There is to be remembered the bitter cold day we were to learn to pitch pyramidal tents properly, when the ground was so splid time and effort were turned solely to keeping warm and picking holes for tent pegs in ground frozen solid as concrete. Impossible to drive they were never properly placed, nor was the tent satisfactorily erected; thus the day brought only misery and the lesson unlearned. Aside from a few hot foots for the sleepy the inside lectures held

interest and were of some real value.

Days moved along somewhat leisurely. The morning parades continued to be a morale builder. Better catching the spirit of the event was the name attached to it by the men, "The Walk Around." It never ceased to produce, out of it decadence, new bits of humor. Hardly worth mentioning was the lip and tongue noise uttered in chorus after being dressed up for the parade and given at ease. Just as the noise ceased and smiles were curling lips, the battalion was called to attention and the command "Forward March" set off the first bars of "Whistle While you Work" as it had so many times before, and feet began at once to shuffle off for a left turn and another walk around was begun. Usually a few late comers slipped from between barracks and into ranks unnoticed.

There they went helmet liners stacked high on knit hoods, towels, and mufflers, combat packs on backs, rifles on shoulders, collars up, and frosty steam ejecting from nostrils, proving the morning temperature. The cooks added their color by appearing regularly in soiled white pants. They had just finished preparing breakfast, but no one was exempted from this early morning morale booster. The men usually whistled with the music bearing out its philosophy, and hardly stopped to salute the colonel as he stood with his aides 'neath the theaters marquee in the dim of the dawn.

His little dwarf's in Company "A" rounded the corners with the battalion in two more right turns, and at the rear of the theater was divided into proper details for the day. The morning program had been practiced for months with out exception and continued 'til Ellis was a memory.

Behind the theater one morning just before Sergeant Harshman was called upon to fall out his details occurred one of those bits of humor that saves many a day from being wholly monotonous. An order was given that seemed somewhat impossible. Captain Simmons, who had not been with the company long, gave it. He was dressing Company "A" on "B" company and while the company was at "Dress Right, Dress" he became aware that it was necessary to move the men back two paces. With their left arms extended to the side and eyes right his command was; "Two steps backwards, Forward March!"

Sometimes the tedium of training would be broken by motion pictures on training phases. Men could sit hours in the theater, see the same pictures over so many times they could recite the dialogues before the image on the screen opened its mouth. The bugle that screeched the opening of each Signal Corp production will ring in memories forever. Pictures of military security were the most dramatic. They liked one with its telephone happy copy chief who shouted, "Tear Down page one, Save two and three for copy" and the Nazi agent who turned a neat piece of deception, and informed through his short wave set a lurking submarine, climaxing another story. Something about a Navajo blanket, a fire, and a beach somewhere in the vicinity of Hawaii. But, of course, there were many many others besides those on Military Security. The Anopholies Mosquito, for instance, and "Why we Fight." The last being the title of a series of which there were supposed to have 8 pictures, but where were the last three?

RAILROAD DETAILS

Contemplating work on railroads somewhere overseas, it was proposed that men should get the feel of the work by attacking railroad problems first hand. Two groups of men were picked from the company. The first was sent to work on the Burlington route near Rushville, Illinois, and the second was sent later to Bradford, Illinois. In both cases, the Army, aided by civilian railroad crews under civilian supervision, undertook the job of training the men into competent section hands. Really an effective method of instruction. The two details were noted for being what was described as a "good deal." It was a break from regular training routine, and besides learning the fundamentals of certain railroad problems and gaining a valuable knowledge generally of what make the trains stay on the track, there were freedoms of civilian life to be enjoyed.

The men worked the same hours as civilian workmen, and, when work was finished for the day, the towns before mentioned awaited the soldier and civilian alike. The men and their officers in charge lived in railroad crew cars and had a kitchen car, dining car and shower car attached to their bunk cars, and lived the life of a rail-

road man. Home was a siding off the main track near the edge of town.

Mornings after breakfast, when civilians usually begin to stir, the boys, bundled in their arctic Parkas, for the weather was still very cold, loaded on to buck boards with civilians and went putting off to work. They build a bridge near Bradford, and laid rail at Rushville. The men who went to Bradford brag that the morning and evening milk train was not once held up while taking out old bent and moving abutments, and those at Rushville claim a record of 3400 feet of track in one day and 12 miles of track laid during their 3 weeks stay. Burlington officials praised the work highly, and offered as tokens of appreciation, week-end visits to Chicago on board furlough trains which were especially halted for the men. One of the superintendents personally distributed cigarettes among them.

Those who went to Bradford remember affectionately their foreman. A veteran of 30 years service with Burlington, named Meyers. Civilian friends knew him as "Bally," the soldiers called him "Dad." At Rushville, also, the foreman was a regular fellow. The men tell of having carried out a threat to throw him into a hog pen, causing much excitement among the pigs and laughter among the men and foreman alike who accepted it all in fun.

The civilians turned out to dance with the young gandy dancers in both details, on two occasions in Rushville. Later families invited the men in small groups to dinner in their homes. There was a dinner for fathers and sons in Bradford, where men got together for an evening pleasure while mothers and daughters served them. It was a homey affair. Men without sons present adopted sons among the boys. All played at games or stood and talked with their new found dads before dinner. Afterward the town's young talent entertained. The army added its impromptu contribution by popular request. The men gathered on the stage and sang "I've been working on the railroad." One of the men accompanied on the piano and the room was filled with harmony. Out of such social events arose enduring friendships which continued by mail long after Camp Ellis days.

Among the favorite bars and eat houses in Rushville was a care named "Ping's Pantry." The lady there, no one knows her name, baked

cherry pie for a number of the men one night. Such things men like to remember when they are away from home. She served them coffee with it, too.

It is told that meals were wholesome but somewhat irregular in the dining car. It took a good cook and a genius to prepare a meal salvaged from the remains of a midnight snack. Entering at a morning hour to pilfer the larder, one was likely to find another had conceived the idea first but after a short period of mutual embarrassment the good taste of ham was enough to justify the misdemeanor.

There were as yet some miserably cold days. Now, as the training periods ended, the weather showed promise of changing for the better. Now also the men had become acquainted and dreaded going back to camp nevertheless the trucks came after them. Barracks bags were loaded on, and most every one slept as the trucks swung along the road to Ellis.

SHAWNEE NATIONAL PARK

Maneuvers--playing war but without the pleasure a kid reaps from it, forming his own strategems and being free to returning home to domestic tranquility when the sun sets or hunger begins to gnaw his stomach. Mother is always around to see that her little soldier doesn't get wet, cold, tired or hurt. Playing such games with officers in command, who enjoy the strategy of the game themselves and tell the essence of the sport is in its hardships, is another thing. The Army makes it an arduous experience, simulating the conditions of battle in every respect, stopping only short of critical injury, if possible.

Thus, in Shawnee National Park an artificial dispute was promoted, and certain lands were presumed to be coveted by opposite forces.

An inevitable system of strategic sparring for positions ensued, and developed into a final battle, not without minor skirmishes. The Reds fought the Blues in those cold blusty days ending February and beginning March. Snow fell. It was bitterly cold at times, rain replaced the cold occasionally with a penetrating dampness, and once or twice

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the sun came out to warm an afternoon. It wasn't a battle on a grand scale. The forces were very small indeed, only 83 men supported Company "A", not more than enough to create a good skirmish in a major operation. So, Company "A", with half its company present, set up a command post and sent out patrols to reconnoiter an enemy, whose size and position were unknown.

Beginning February 28 and for the next nine days, there was every tactical problem appropriate for such a unit to encounter, not to mention the difficulties and "snafu" involved. Trucks stalled and were abandoned. Men and equipment were captured by both sides. Home was out-of-doors in a fox hole or half shelter, but, though it was against the rules, some housed themselves in abandoned buildings. Everyone ate "C" rations, warmed them on fires when possible, or otherwise choked down cold, near frozen mouthfuls, spooned directly from the can. Hovering in groups, rifles loaded with blank rounds, and fire crackers for hand-grenades, there was the thrill of battle, a feeling that each man was already somewhat of a veteran.

The story actually begins on Monday morning, February 28, when these men arose and clad themselves in their Parkas to depart Ellis on maneuvers. As was mentioned, the numbers were few. The men excused were either in school or already away from camp on one of the two railroad details. Earlier than usual the whistle blew, and the men got into their heavy clothing and battle gear. Passes had been called on at noon Sunday, in order that preparedness would speed the Monday morning departure. By 0800 the convo^y was formed, men, wearing their new packs, carriers, loaded into their assigned trucks and the convoy roared out of camp. They rode 151 miles that day, arriving in an open field about 3 miles south of Greenville, Illinois at 0235 in the afternoon. However it was near 1700 when it was finally decided to

pitch tents and make a night of it here. The weather was not cold at the start of the day, but was cloudy, and the promised snow began to fall. With it the temperature began to drop and the night was very cold.

In the bitter morning cold the men ate, packed and entrucked to travel the yet remaining 94 miles to Shawnee National Park, where the test of might was to be. Again in the afternoon there was more snow and it was as though nature herself was in on the planning, for it appeared that in addition to the rigors of maneuvers; there was to be added the buffeting of the late winter elements.

The business of eating food in the cold was already becoming routine, and again the morning of March 1 was no exception. The day then was spent in changing bivouac areas for the start of tactical maneuvers which were in full swing by night fall.

The next morning the company rose from its foxholes, and engaged the blue forces at Pamona in what was their first meeting. The encounter was centered around a point quaintly known as "Grassy Knob." The fight ceased at about 1630, and the men dug themselves in to enjoy a warming of "C" rations and the remaining interest of the day was in scouting and in keeping warm in the never quite sufficient bedding a soldier can carry with him. Evidently the enemy was frightened by "A" Company's first show of strength, for on this next morning it was necessary to load onto trucks and pursue the enemy to another point to be known by the lonely name of the shurch, (Jerusalem Church), an unimpressive but typically rural structure. From here the men continued on foot along the road to Murphysboro in a tactical march, posting the usual flank guards and advanced scout patrol. Near Hickory Ridge Tower the enemy was again sighted and engaged. Again at 1630 the fighting ceased and the company moved

to a bivouac area about half a mile away. It proceeded to rain, and then, turning colder, froze, making it miserable for everyone. By morning, however, warmer winds had loosened the icy crust, and now mud did its sabotage. Equipment was hopelessly stuck. Two hours late the men trudged on in gummy earth by foot to meet their foe. They found him just south of Jerusalem Church and fought him there till 1645, but there was a change in luck and Company "A's" reds were set back. It was windy and very cold when the company took shelter in bivouac near an old C.C.C. camp.

On the morning of March 5 and for the remainder of the day the men worked at preparing defensive positions along the road south of their bivouac area and waited watchfully until well into the night (2215) when powerful blue forces attacked and maintained a strong offensive.

On March 6 Company "A" cleared its defenses and made another strategic withdrawal to positions about a mile south of Grassy Knob and were again attacked by the blue troops. From this point on Company "A's" red forces fought a retarding action. They bivouaced at last in an area near Bald Knob and on March 7 at 0715 formed a convoy and returned home to Camp Ellis, leaving the woes of the battle field behind them. The fiberboard barracks with their three warm stoves and double decker bunks were a welcomed paradise, and a good warm meal in the habitually criticized mess hall was also a treat.

Even the trip back was not without incident. The slick highways are blamed for the smash up of 3 trucks and Sgt. Alert worried his way out of a statement of charges. Every individual had his way ~~EXPERIENCES~~ experiences to tell. Casualties were confined only to those taken prisoner. Injuries were not serious. Pfc Spahn

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wore a picturesque black eye, the result of a butt stroke from an enemy rifle and a brawl with fists before his capture.

One of the cooks was fortunate or unfortunate as you care to express it, in being in the neighborhood of his home at Wolf Lake all the while, but having little chance to visit his family.

Now, with the big events of training behind, there were many smaller details to be checked and rechecked. At the same time old schools continued and new schools were formed. Schools were that part of the specialized training which was now, more than ever, all important. Any other training in the field was a repeat and a process of checking and rechecking the roster and records for the men who had somehow missed this or missed that ensued. With new men in the company and with such men as cooks who are noted for fouling up training schedules, there were constant trips to the rifle and machine gun ranges and even the infiltration course. Standard operating procedure, to be certain of satisfying, caused movies and lectures to be repeated besides presenting new subjects almost daily.

These weeks before leaving home soil were clean up weeks in every respect. New physical exams and vaccinations were had. Even the dentist checked teeth again. Glasses were provided and repaired, clothing was checked, new equipment issued, and the Table of Organization underwent its series of last minute changes. With all the turmoil and headaches in the orderlz room, such unforgettable standards as the morning walk around, retreat and Saturdaz inspections continued. Yes, until this very end at Ellis, the battalion occasionallz double-timed for the colonel after Saturdays' full dress retreat.

Generally speaking, it was for the men an easier life than

previously experienced in the army. Passes were freer. The furlough trains pulled out regularly for Chicago and St. Louis, and it was seldom Sundays could not be spent with families when distance was not too great. Some men still eligible for furloughs got them.

One of those early Spring afternoons the entire personnel of Camp Ellis, including the W.A.C.'s, enjoyed watching the Air Force demonstrate its marksmanship. The many organizations of the camp, together with their bands, marched a mile or so beyond Spoon River to the bluffs that rise out of the valley on the other side, and perched high on a huge bald Knob, and awaited the formations of fighters and bombers which soon came, and, as in combat, scanned their objective, which was this time a dummy convoy of tanks far from us on a narrow country road in the valley. The pilots peeled off in turn and strafed and later bombed them. It was an interesting sight. The day was so pretty itself that in spite of the long march there and back it was all worth while and might have been so even without the aerial show for the chance to be out in the fresh spring sunshine.

Rainy days were to follow however. Many of them. In fact new flood records were almost certain along the Illinois River and our own Spoon River. While in a movie the middle of one early April afternoon the men were called out on emergency, and with some of the company heavy equipment went immediately to fight the flood at Spoon River where it threatened a lumber supply and mill near the old site of Bernadotte. Later on the weight of floods bore down on the larger systems of the great Mississippi Valley. The thousands of threatened farmers made their appeal again as they had the year before, and again Camp Ellis sent its men and equipment.

Acts of heaven are easily understood compared to the judgement

of man who inflicts upon himself his own hardships. And so in the drench of Aprils worst rains it was decided the ugliness of Camp Ellis was no longer bearable. Around every barracks and along every street sod must be laid. It suddenly became the most important item in the camp schedule, and every Engineer did his part in the landscaping. Of course it was unthinkable to take men from their regular days schedules, though it was daily becoming a difficult task to keep them occupied. Thus it became an extra-curricular activity, robbing the men of their evenings pleasure and in some instances, sleep. The weather couldn't have been meaner. The beautiful grass covered hills on the reservation wet from days of spring drizzles were invaded by soldiers, their sergeants, officers, and trucks. The sod was ~~to~~ peeled off in muddy chunks, wrestled into the trucks, and spanked into position, covering the sandy hard-packed clay in the company area. As trucks moved into the fresh scalped pastures the mud seemed as endless as the rain, and ruts were soon bottomless to the reach of tires and chains. Colonel Engel's impressed the men with the importance of the job, accompanied by his chow. Nothing stopped the digging, and with the arrival of "cats" trucks began to "shed" their loads back to the roads and in to the company area.

The slowing of the work by the steady rains caused a final climaxing day when schedules were put aside and all Ellis turned out to lay sod. As though in disgust of mans' determination, the skys poured more rain and a colder, more miserable mess was not experienced for months. The sod resembled mud balls. At one time every truck was stuck in the bald slopes, "Cats" themselves were rendered almost immobile. Ruts and mud made walking unreasonable, and the strange sight continued as did the rain into the night, until the job was humorously called finished. Fortz acres of land were a ruined swirl of knee deep ruts, when the men returned to their barracks, tired, cold and miserably wet and muddied.

Men firing the machine guns also reported the rain to have made the ranges a wallow of mud, many a pair of fatigues were caked over with Illinois brownish gum at the end of the day.

Training was rapidly winding up, and as men completed their last requirements they were hustled off on such odd details as repairing training courses and putting up portable hutments from remnants of old C.C.C. camps. The black tarpaper type for use as tool sheds or storage places for equipment. It was now in these last few weeks that wives were moving in close to camp for a last chance to be with their husbands, and men were getting out of camp at every possible moment to meet them. No one knowing the real date for departure, all considered every weekend the last, and left the Company area a desolate place over Sunday. A few men were transferred out as the last days came on and last minute efforts to replace them were made.

Clothing had been checked, and now the big crates of new equipment were broken open. Items were replaced others were turned in. The time had come to pack and crate all equipment to go with the Company, duffle bags were marked in code, and stenciled with names as were the crates of supplies. Generally the week that ended our training camp phase was an exciting one filled with many wild guesses as to where we were headed. Everyone felt a little relieved to know the training period was over, but the empty feeling of being about to leave their homes and friends, for no one knew where nor how long, develt in every heart.

When the last week end arrived it was recognized as such by everyone, and telephones jingled constantly to every corner of America. Some were bidding a last farewell, some were making a last effort to see a wife or sweetheart. At 9 o'clock on that last Saturday night men were still lined up, making last minute exchanges of equipment and

counting the minutes until they might leave the main gate, pass in hand. As they had been allowed to expect to leave Ellis sometime during the first day or two of the new week, the Sunday between was all important. Passes were a miserable disappointment having been made out to allow freedom from camp between Saturday evening at 10:00 and 5:30 Sunday morning. Most men, angry and determined, stamped out of the orderly room vowing to spend their last day Absent Without Leave. They did, and the company area embarrassingly empty that Sunday, nor was mention made of the fact.

Monday was a day of instructions and a practice formation on 26th Street. The men were having chow now with 1309, equipment that was to go except full-field packs and such apparel to be worn. Personal possessions with few exceptions could be taken, but all that was carried had to be confined to the one Duffle Bag. The bag in most cases was over packed, and almost impossible to buckle. The company was told to expect a "dry-run" the following day and continue to expect them. The men of course hoped for no false starts and, though they could hardly believe it, the train pulled out with only a halt or two before it entered the main line and headed northeast.

ON THE TRAIN

It was a relief to get onto the train, get settled and not have the loading to do a second or third time. It was about 1:00 P.M. in the afternoon May 3rd when battalion started east and the day can be considered a farewell to home and all that was America. Here began a total blackout with the outside world. A social life came to being among the men themselves. They played poker, read pulp magazines and newspapers, or slept. The aisle became littered with paper, wrappers, and cigarettes. Chow was ushered through the cars by the cooks and served in paper plates. It was a job maintaining some form of cleanliness. Outside of the work imposed upon the cooks, the men were free

to enjoy their leisure to their own liking within the confines of the coaches. There was guard duty, but not a drudging detail. They were pullman cars and perhaps better than might have been expected. A porter actually made down the beds and lined them with fresh clean sheets, the first to be seen in months.

The train headed, first, north through Chicago, then around the lower end of Lake Michigan and east through the night to Cleveland, where in the bright morning hours, the train stopped while the men were mustered into formation in the railroad yards for a few minutes of calisthenics. Back in the coaches the day was again spent gazing from windows, reading and seeking the diversions, while the engine pulled its cargo on through Ohio, Pennsylvania and into New York State where night again enwrapped the train. Buffalo, Rochester, and Albany slipped by in the night. The train slowed and stopped for a few minutes at Camp Miles Standish causing some excitement, and for the moment seemed to confirm the previous prediction of some men. It was very early then, and as the train moved on into Cape Cod, people were just beginning to crowd the streets on their way to work. Buzzards' Baz gleamed in the morning sun and smelled of fish. There was little doubt now that we were headed for Camp Edwards well out on the caps.

CAMP EDWARDS

It was a hot sultry day to be bundled in a wool uniform, strapped into a field pack, and weighted down with rifle and duffle bags. Getting from the train to the barracks assigned us seemed forever. The camp was huge and, though there were hundreds of encamped troops waiting out their shipment, the place seemed almost deserted. There were several Post Exchanges, service clubs and a theater in the neighborhood. A barber shop was busy shaving heads. By now a man was more the odd one if he had his full growth of hair.

With all there was at hand, there was a restriction to dampen every move. Phone calls were censored, mail was held up, security was of prime importance. There were endless inspections to undergo, and now the P!O!E! examination so long talked of was upon us. How many men would pass?

Between inspections the company was kept busy with close order drill and other Standards of training, with twelve hour passes promised, which, incidently, failed to materialize, when the business of preparing for embarkation was completed. Even the cooks, who were experiencing long hours in the kitchen, were made to march back and forth across the open expanse of Cape Cod in cadence, and to, practice the art of bayonet thrusts.

Inspections completed, the day arrived when P.O.E. inspectors dropped in to examine and pass on the personnel of the outfit, to label them as fit or unfit for service abroad. Some men had fostered dreams of a return home when the culling was completed, but, to the general dismay of all, the only important observation seemingly made was that all men were capable of standing on their feet, had two legs, two arms and other complementary physical attributes.

After a few more lineups before the supply room for a few last minute items of equipment the company again packed its bags, joined the battalion for its last train ride, around the bay to Boston.