

# Army Engineer

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*Salute to WWII Army Engineer Veterans*

The making of a NEW documentary...

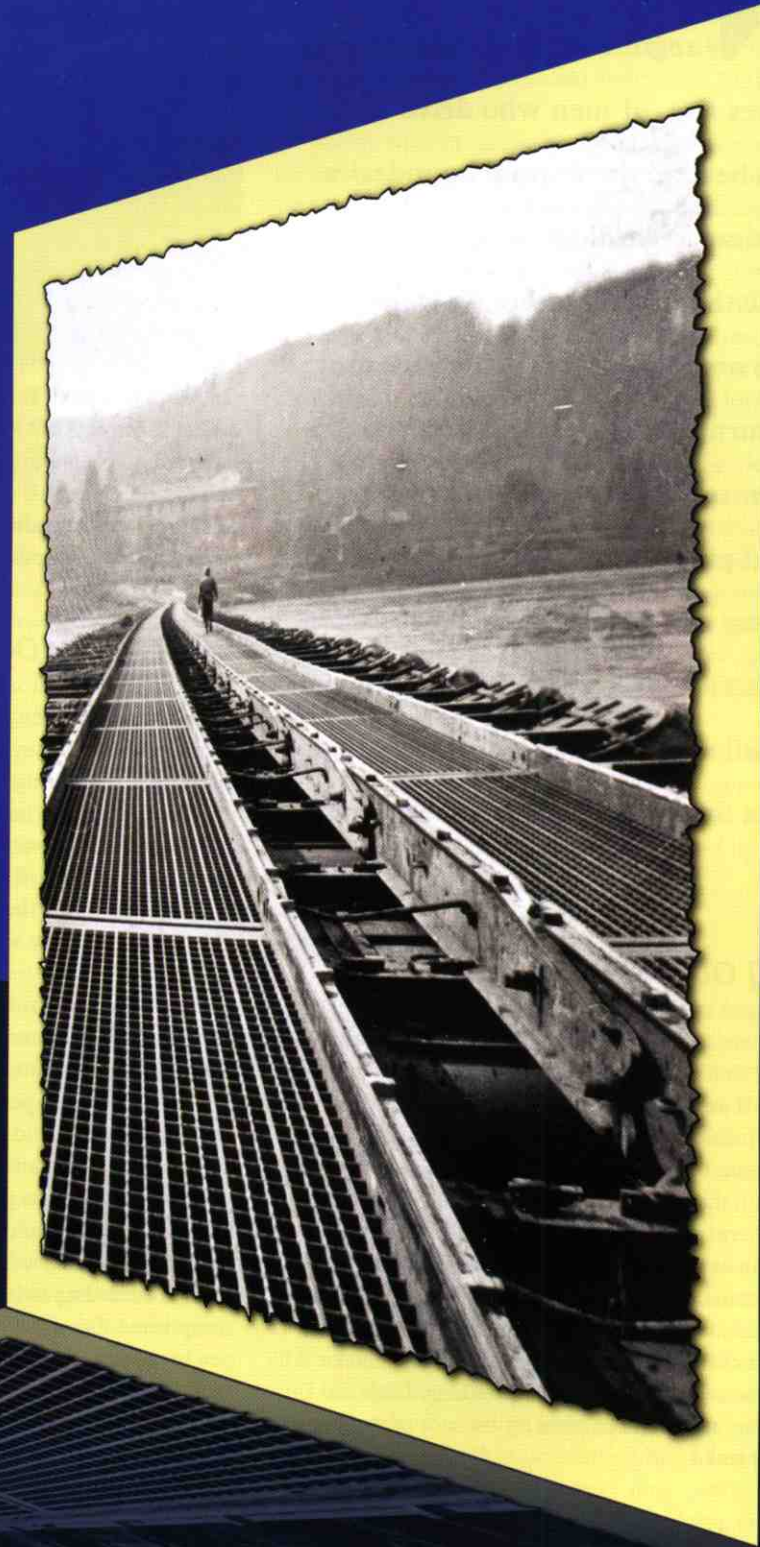


about ARMY ENGINEERS who served during

# World War II

By Marion Chard

# NO BRIDGE TOO FAR



**N**o Bridge Too Far—for me it conjures images of engineer regiments with indomitable spirit and resolve, of men who drive themselves beyond the normal boundaries and limitations regardless of danger. Men who expose themselves to booby-traps, land-mines and direct enemy fire, but prevail against insurmountable odds. Men who plunge themselves into swift-flowing icy-waters, and push themselves to all extremes, but never say die. Men who sacrifice and give their best to keep the armies moving, knowing full well they'll receive little or no recognition for the tremendous efforts put forth.

### *Starting out*

When I began my research into my father's (WWII) history four years ago, never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined finding my words gracing such publications as World War II and Army Engineer Magazine. Nor the opportunity and privilege of meeting hundreds of veterans and their families, and becoming the official historian not only for my father's unit, the 540th Combat Engineers, but the other engineer regiments of VI Corps.

What began as a personal, insatiable curiosity, and deep-rooted commitment to discover the story behind my father's tour of duty, led to a project of immense proportion which now includes a comprehensive web site and forum, and a several hour documentary series in the making. Little did I realize what the future held in store for me, nor of the years I'd spend in its wake.

### *Finding the facts*

My research led me to such places as the Army Corps of Engineers' Office of History, and The National Archives

(NARA) in St. Louis and College Park, Maryland. I also perused archived newspapers, devoured magazine articles, scoured the Internet (praise be to Google), and history books, and finally, obtained priceless accounts from the men themselves.

It took several months before things began to "click" into place, but before long I was fitting the puzzle pieces back together with the assistance of the veterans. Their letters were like manna from heaven, and once those flood gates opened, there would be no stopping the wealth of info, which flowed my way.

Soon I had enough information to start a web site, and each month the stories, photos, histories and anecdotes increased exponentially. I also contacted a personal research assistant who agreed to retrieve the more than 2000 pages related to the 540th Engineer Combat Regiment, which were available through NARA in Maryland. These documents included maps, photos, after-action reports, and daily, weekly, and monthly journals compiled by the army staff offices, from 1942-1945. Shortly after my home office looked like a whirlwind on the wide-open prairie.

### *Putting it together*

After looking through my vast collection and talking with the men from each engineer regiment, I began dreaming of writing a book, for very little documentation was available on WWII engineering units. Sadly, it appeared history had forgotten the men who secured the beachheads, built the roads and bridges, de-activated the mine fields, brought running water to thirsting divisions and bombed-out cities, fought as infantry, and risked their lives on the front lines. I decided then and there to try with all my powers to rectify this unfortunate oversight.

One of the first rules to successful writing is organization, for without it, too many precious hours are wasted hunting down related material. So I created a veteran's database, which held all their pertinent data including names, addresses, unit designations, and next of kin. Secondly I bought a huge file cabinet and began sorting through the mountains of paperwork in various piles around my desk. Each veteran was assigned a folder and then alphabetized by last name and unit. NARA documents were sorted by month and year and further divided according to battalion. Once this grueling task was accomplished, I could now concentrate all my efforts of putting pen to paper.

### *Those who were there*

While some men were eager as five-year-olds at Baskin Robbins, others took some persuasion to share their experiences. A few felt they didn't have much to impart, "We were only doing our job ma'am", others were just darned shy, while most couldn't believe I was actually interested in

