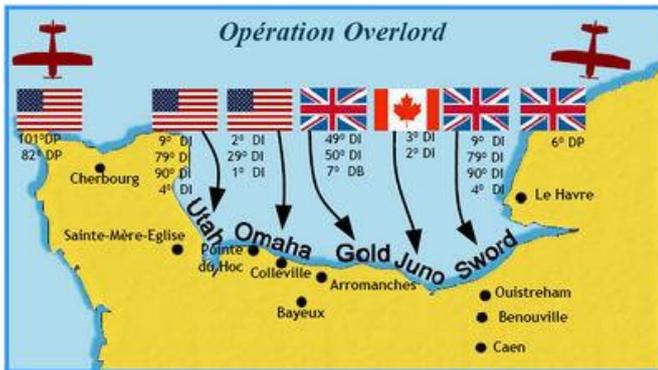


USA IN WW2

Although the USA had remained neutral in the early years of WW2, they had supported the allies by supplying war materials under the Lend-Lease Act of March 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, however, caused the USA's immediate entry into the European theatre of war, at first in North Africa and then in Italy with British troops 1943-45.



With the main invasion of France being planned for June 1944, there was a major influx of US army and air force personnel into Britain to prepare for an attack on Normandy. Cornwall was ideally placed as the main embarkation point for American troops who were tasked with taking Utah and Omaha beaches in Operation Overlord, the code name for the Battle of Normandy.

That is how the 341st Engineer Regiment of the US Army came to be stationed at Hengar Manor in 1944 for a summer training camp under the command of Colonel Edward H Coe.

Extract from The History of the 341st Engineer Regiment July 1943 – March 1946



Col. E.H.Coe

As the companies completed their assigned construction jobs they moved to Hengar's camp, near St. Tudy, Cornwall county, to take part in a Regimental training period, designed to cover all phases of Engineer work and basic combat tactics so as to prepare the men for their work on the continent.

Company "A" was given the task of preparing the site for the camp and had started work on it on February 26. On March 1 Headquarters and one platoon of Company "C" moved to the camp to assist "A" Company. Two days later First Battalion Headquarters moved to the site. The Third Platoon of Company "C", its job of road construction at Cleave Camp Anti-aircraft range completed, also joined the group.

Second Battalion Headquarters moved to Hengar's camp on March 17. Company "F" finished its Handy Cross camp on March 20 and immediately moved south to the training camp, followed on March 25 by Company "B" which had completed the Walford House and Tetton Park camp projects. Regimental Headquarters was moved to the site on March 27 and 28.

Thus, by the end of March all companies of the Regiment except "D" and "E" were encamped, ready for the training period which was scheduled to start April 1, and last for possibly eight weeks, or longer, depending upon the war situation. A reduction in the number of men taking part in the program came about almost at the last moment. On March 25 orders were received placing 190 men and six officers of the Regiment on detached service in the marshalling areas. They were to assist in various service capacities—cooks, camp supervisors, surgeon, etc.—in the assault exercise "Beaver."

The two complete companies absent when the training program started, Companies "D" and "E", were busy with important duties in another section of Southern England. Company "D" was in Halwell rounding up its work in operating the Assault Range Headquarters in that area as well as repairing damage done by artillery and Navy gunfire in the amphibious exercises. It was released from this assignment on April 5th and entered into the training program at that time.

Company "E" was unable to join the other companies because of an operational bridge construction assignment in the Totnes area. This bridge, a steel and concrete structure spanning the River Dart, was important from both an engineering and a military viewpoint. Considered as an engineering feat, it marked the first time that a Bailey Bridge, designed as a temporary span was to be erected as a semi-permanent structure. Considered from a military standpoint, it was to be the main thoroughfare by which troops crossed the river into the marshalling areas in that vicinity in preparation for their journey to the continent.

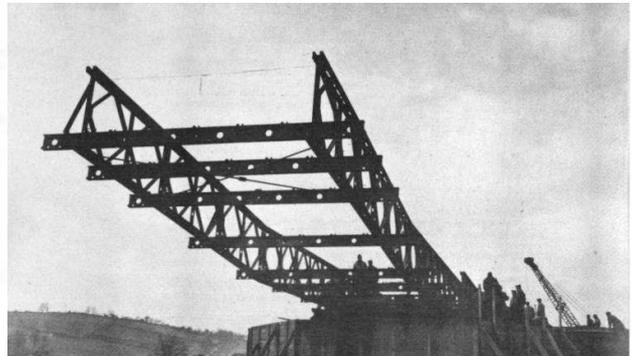
From their arrival at Hengar in March 1944 until their deployment in June 1944, the engineers of the 341st practised the skills listed below in order to support the invading forces and enable them to move quickly and safely to secure their advance into France.

Just as the training program was being prepared for the troops at Hengar's camp, orders were received which assigned the 341st Engineer Regiment to Advance Section Communications Zone. With the knowledge—or at least an indication—of what the Regiment's work was to be after D-Day, those in charge of training were able to emphasize those subjects felt to be most needed in coming operations.

Thus it was that a large proportion of time was spent on the subjects:

- Engineer Reconnaissance
- Explosives and Demolitions
- Bailey Bridging
- Map and Photograph Reading
- Mines and Booby Traps
- Combat Exercises
- Camouflage
- Design Timber Trestle Bridge
- Hasty Field Fortifications
- Establishing Water Points
- Hasty Bridge Repair
- Hasty Road Repair

In addition to these subjects, and a review of all basic subjects necessary for the Engineer soldier, the following special technical topics were studied: Operation of quarries, crushers and central mix plants for production of bituminous patching materials. Construction and maintenance of draining structures. Maintenance operations, including bituminous patching, under heavy traffic. Major road repairs to subgrade, base and wearing surfaces, and new construction in cut and fill areas.



Bridge Construction

DANCE



Despite the intense training, the GIs still had time to enjoy themselves including socialising in St Tudy, as Roger Willcocks remembered in the following extract from 'The Binding Stone' published in 2000.

Cornwall in the latter years of the war was an armed camp. Hengar, the Onslows still lived there, was an American depot. The GIs figured largely in the dances and socials held in the school after the old hall burnt down. We knew when D-day was going to be as all leave was stopped. We were deeply moved when new filtered back that few, if any, of our friends had survived the D-day landings. Having seen the Normandy landing area with the bottomless mud flats, I am not surprised that many heavily laden troopers and vehicles disembarked and went straight down.

OPERATION OVERLORD

6TH JUNE - 30TH AUGUST 1944

The invasion of France began on 6th June with the D Day landings on Normandy beaches, code name Operation Neptune. This involved an airborne assault by some 1,200 aircraft ahead of the amphibious landing of nearly 160,000 troops from Britain, the USA and Canada on the five beaches code named Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword.

When the beach heads had been secured, then engineers moved in to aid the advance. Accordingly, the 341st Regiment landed on Utah beach on 23rd June, as described below.

JOURNEY TO THE CONTINENT

The great storm which rocked the English Channel the third week of June and practically shut off all shipping had its effect upon the movement of the 341st Engineer Regiment into France. Vehicles and equipment which were supposed to accompany the men arrived nearly a week later. Company "A", which was supposed to precede the unit over, arrived the same day as the rest of the Regiment. Its vehicles also did not come until days later.

Company "A" was loaded aboard its assigned ships for the trip on June 21 and 22. The rest of the Regiment, minus vehicles and Regimental Headquarters, also left marshalling area C-9 on June 21 to embark, but due to the heavy sea, orders were changed and the men returned to the marshalling area. The next day, however, was not a dry run. The men were loaded, most of them on the ship Empire Battleaxe. The journey to France had begun.

On June 23, D-17, at 1400 hours the first contingent of 341st Engineer Regiment landed on "Utah" beach of the Normandy beachhead. The final ship to shore movement was made in practically every type of landing craft available, including LCM, LCT, LST, LSI and LCAs.

As is customary with that type of landing, many of the men had to wade ashore the last 200 yards in waist-high water.

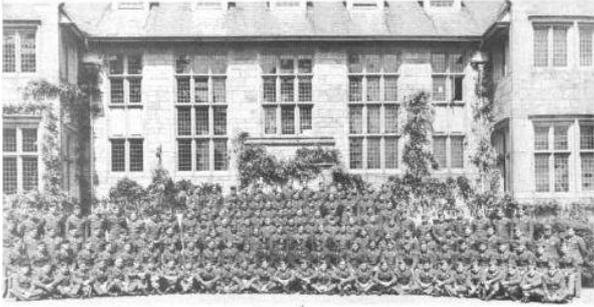
Temporary camps were set up by the companies in Transit Area B for the night. During the next three days movements were numerous. New camps were established practically daily. Most of the companies were forced to march inland while waiting for the arrival of their trucks and equipment. During these first few days, while the men were living in fox-holes, many without blankets and shelter halves (which were with the vehicles), they were subjected to bombing, strafing and shell fire. Luckily there were no casualties.

On June 26 Regimental Headquarters and the first contingent of the vehicles landed on Utah beach. A Regimental camp was set up 4½ miles northwest of St. Saveur Le Vicomte. The remainder of the vehicles and equipment arrived between June 27 and July 1.

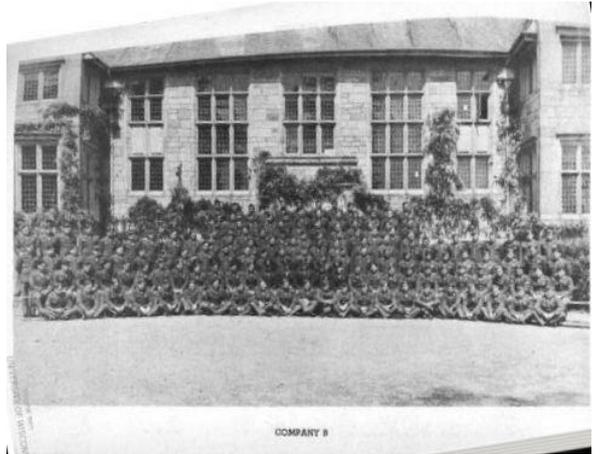
Even before all the equipment was unloaded, however, the companies had received orders concerning the tasks assigned to them and preparatory work was started. By July 2, seven days after the first group had landed, the companies had moved to their first assigned camps and work was well under way.

Leading up to D Day, the regiment had been specifically trained for road building, and their first job in France was to repair the cratered highway N13 between Valognes and Cherbourg, a route critical for the transport of men and supplies to the forthcoming offensive in the south. During the course of the war, however, they had worked mainly on railroads and railway bridges throughout France, Belgium and Germany. Between 21 August and 31 December 1944, Colonel Coe's engineers had rehabilitated almost 500 miles of railroad.

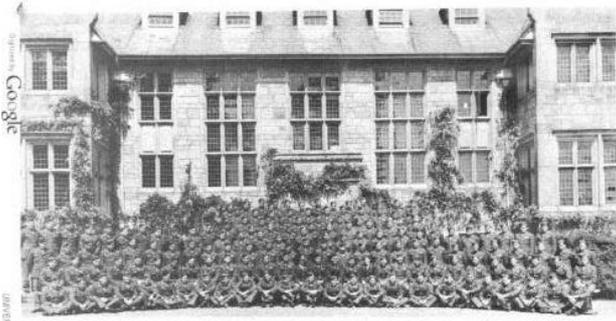
US 341ST ENGINEER REGIMENT AT HENGAR 1944



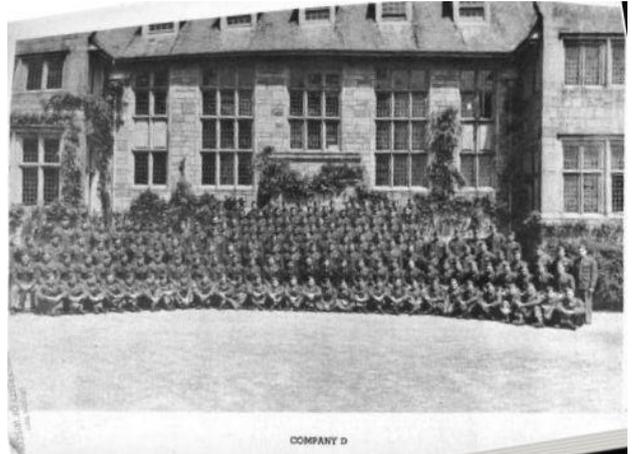
COMPANY A



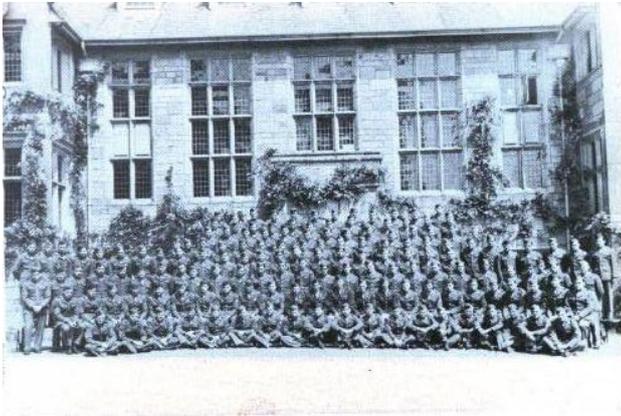
COMPANY B



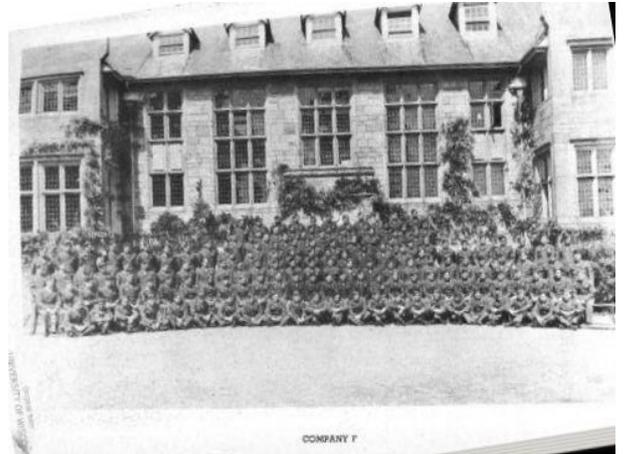
COMPANY C



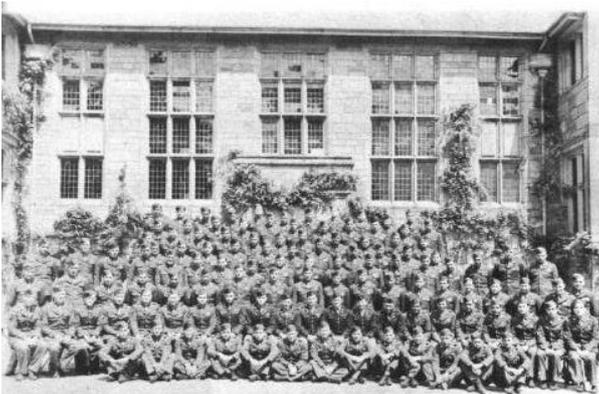
COMPANY D



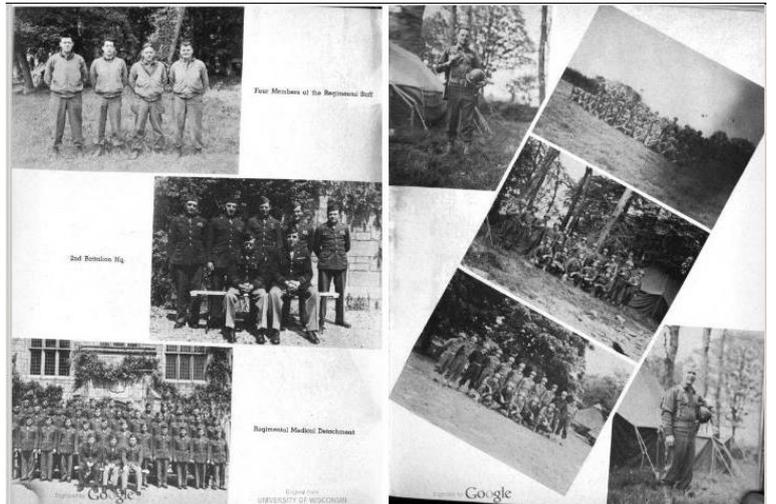
COMPANY E



COMPANY F



HEADQUARTERS AND SERVICE COMPANY



Four Members of the Regimental Staff

2nd Battalion Hq

Regimental Medical Detachment

Regimental Medical Detachment

Google