

History
From 589th Engineer Battalion

589th Engr. BN

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY HEADQUARTERS
589TH ENGINEER BATTALION (CONST) Ft. Hood, Texas 76544

On January 1947, a dusty file was removed from its storage place in the Office of the Chief of Military History. Its cover was labeled - 241st Engineer Combat Battalion - and it contained the history of an engineer organization, which traced its origins to the 31st Engineer Company, first constituted in 1940 at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. With a stroke of a pen, the 241st designation became no more and when the file was replaced; it represented a newly conceived organization, the 589th Engineer Battalion.

The file slept for nearly twenty years, and so did the 589th, until January 21, 1966 when the US Army Corps announced at Fort Hood, Texas and in General Orders 22 the activation of the battalion under TOE 5-115E, 5-116E, 5-117E, and 5-118E. The new unit was to be assigned to the Fourth US Army, attached for all purposes to III Corps and Fort Hood and under the operational control and staff supervision of the III Corps Engineer. It was the very beginning. The very beginning was not the most active period for the battalion, for, in fact, it was without men, without equipment and without spirit. But, on February 14, Major Jonathan L. Minear, CE, 064527, was assigned and became the first commanding officer of the fledgling unit. To the new LTC Minear fell the job of bringing the battalion alive, and as he soon discovered, it would be a monumental task.

He had 37 officers and 867 enlisted men to obtain and train; thousands of dollars worth of equipment to requisition, receive, deprocess, service and maintain; acres of land to borrow for motor pools and supply yards; barracks to prepare for 900 troops and a battalion spirit to kindle, nurture and feed. Colonel Minear was the battalion and the battalion was he. By February 17 1966, the battalion was with other people also; soldiers with all skills who began to arrive at an outstanding rate. On March 25 1966 alone, 157 men were assigned to the battalion. Average gain rates for that month reached 18 new men per day. Through March 14, 1966, the battalion strength was concentrated in Headquarters and Headquarters Company for easier control and property accountability; in fact the other companies of which the battalion was comprised were not officially activated. On that day however, it was felt that the battalion strength had reached a sufficient level to support the formation of four companies and, accordingly Special Order 3 was published assigning the first personnel from Headquarters and Headquarters Company to another company in the battalion. B Company began to grow, then C Company, on to A Company, and finally D Company received its complement of men.

At first the companies were little more than detachments, the nucleus consisting in all cases of a Second Lieutenant and a small number of NCO's. Soon however, the gates opened wide and the battalion found itself growing, sometimes uncontrollably, until by May 3 1966, 963 men were calling the battalion, "my unit." To these eager, wide-eyed and intelligent new engineer soldiers, the 589th became The ARMY.

The lack of officers and NCO's was sorely felt during the formative stages of the battalion and it was on the shoulders of the NCO's that a good deal of credit for moving the battalion must go. The immediate task ahead was early defined even as the battalion began to stabilize in strength, train, procure equipment and improve the battalion area. All personnel rose to the tasks. With all due haste and considerable ingenuity, the tasks began. Training took on an importance second to none in those early days as the total extent of battalion skills were becoming known. To overcome a low experience level in most of the lower grades, the battalion entered an Advance Individual Training phase, which consisted, for the most part, of intense training on weapons, drill and ceremonies, military courtesy and general military subjects. This training was a battalion wide effort with classes presented by committees made up of qualified personnel drawn from each company. The training task expanded as it progressed and a modified Basic Unit Training Program was instituted in May to emphasize engineer military occupational specialty training.

Construction projects of various types were sought out so that lower grades could perfect their individual skills and so that supervisory personnel could gain experience in planning, scheduling and supervising construction. The training program was as good as circumstances would allow and the skill level of the battalion rose rapidly, but regulatory restrictions on troop labor projects limited the scope of any large training plan and another means of training was sought. The decision was made that more meaningful training was necessary and led to a more painful decision that brought temporary disruption, but long term profits to the

battalion. Temporary duty was ordered at the Engineer Equipment Operator's School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. So selected battalion members were packing off again, soon to return as confident and skilled engineers capable of learning more and absorbing more important experience. The training job never ends.

While training continued, another phase of battalion activity was concurrently developing and became, in time, and in terms of man-hours spent, the continuing interest of those at the planning level. This phase was supply. The job of requisitioning and receiving all the equipment and supplies necessary for mission accomplishment by the battalion was also monumental. Over 9 graders, 35 bulldozers, 12 towed 18 yard scrapers, 15 rollers of various types and sizes, 9 cranes, 57 generators, 15 1/4 ton jeeps, 26 10 ton wheeled truck tractors, 48 5 ton dump trucks, 42 2&1/2 ton trucks, and thousands of other items were required by the battalion in performing its mission. By February 21st, the battalion was being called daily to take delivery of the supplies and equipment, which like the personnel, began to flood in. In those early stages with no people and no vehicles, the CO himself first went to pick up essential items, until a functioning S4 section could be established.

The influx of supplies presented great problems to the 589th and soon all available storage space was being utilized with no room for the never-ending stream. Daily conferences, phone calls, and meetings were held to prompt III Corps to action and finally a motor pool area was designated for storage. On activation of the battalion, III Corps and Fort Hood initially prepared all requisitions for the unit. But soon this tedious task was taken over by the battalion itself. The lack of a Document Register to account for the many requisitions was soon discovered and resulted in many midnight hours tracking down suspect requisitions and checking to see if, in fact, all battalion equipment was actually on order. It fast appeared that all facets of the supply area would be troublesome when problems with station property also cropped up. The activation in March of the letter companies preceded the S4's capability to efficiently transfer station property items such as cots, sheets, bedding and such, and since men had to be fed and billeted regardless of the accuracy of hand receipts or necessity for property accountability, the resulting snarl caused long hours of inventory and paperwork. Soon however, though supply problems were constant, they became routine and were handled in a routine way with great efficiency, and more attention could be turned to the third of the important tasks concurrently under way, organizing the battalion area.

The battalion was assigned a series of wooden buildings, which formerly housed nurses assigned to the old Fort Hood hospital. The name of the area was the Old Hospital Area and a better description couldn't be found. 35, 25x150 wooden framed buildings, built in 1942 and connected by miles of ramps, made up the compound and the initial condition of the area was not the best. Destined for razing in 1965, only minimal maintenance was pulled on the area since the hospital staff and facilities abandoned it for more luxurious digs; and as the battalion was soon to discover, only minimum funds could be spent to rehabilitate condemned areas. Ingenuity was rampant however and many stories are told of the efforts to improve the area. The corridor system, for instance, more than tripled the walking distance between any two points and A Company soon discovered that a single doorway into one of the corridors from the outside would result in a tremendous shortening of the route between battalion headquarters and the company orderly room. The installation of a doorway was prohibited of course, so Colonel Minear was surprised one day to see a hole cut into the wall of the corridor through which messengers were seen to jump. He said nothing. The next day the hole was framed. A door appeared on the third day, stairs the fourth, and a compacted rock lined path the fifth. Other examples of the ingenuity, which was applied by the battalion to making the area more comfortable, from the S3 inter-office message hole, to the commo security area, to the ever-lengthening pipe, which finally provided III Shop with running water, were daily observed. By August, somehow, the entire battalion area was also painted.

Through it all, the battalion functioned in a hectic manner, bringing things into shape. Capable individuals became identified as their efforts contributed to organizing the battalion. For many, the jobs they were assigned to do would call on their past experience and initiative, for unlike the situation in established organizations, everything was started from scratch in the 589th. Thus the first several months were the "organization" months for the battalion and organize she did until the time came for her to step off on her own and show the world what a fine battalion she would be. A motto was sought and a crest and a flag to guide the battalion in its new endeavors and towards the end of the organizational period, the words "Mountain Movers" passed at least once from everyone's lips. The origins of the motto are already lost, though most recollect that the CO's wife was probably the source. But whatever the source, the motto was embraced and the 589th became at once, the Mountain Mover Battalion.

By mid-July, the battalion strength reached 1123 and a new mood was in the air, a mood caused by the

word that over 25 new officers would be assigned to the battalion. A hush of anticipation crept over the Mountain Movers as everyone discussed and ruminated on the caliber, temperament and suitability of these newcomers to adopt the motto. And then they came. In one ten day period they came in from around the world; from France and Germany, Korea and Okinawa, Fort Belvoir, Fort Campbell and even Fort Hood. A new Commanding Officer to replace LTC Minear (who had been on overseas orders even before joining the battalion). A new XO, S1, S2/3, S4, EEMO, Commo Officer, Personnel Officer, Chaplain, 4 company commanders and many platoon leaders. All came to see what already had been done and they were ready to pitch in and continue.

On 6 August 1966, at Galley Field, Fort Hood, Texas, the change of command ceremony took place as LTC Minear passed the battalion colors to the man who would guide them through exciting times ahead, LTC Myron D. Snoke. With the arrival of the new officers, a great deal of planning for future operations began. LTC Snoke, CE, 062320, took charge of the battalion and shortly the staff was organized and command positions assigned. MAJ. Kenneth J. Davison became the Executive Officer and MAJ. Edwin J. Marcy, Jr. the S2/3. CPT Lawrence T. Doff took over as S1 and CPT Luis Alvarez became the S4. 1LT, (later CPT), Charles E. Freeze assumed duties as the Engineer Equipment Maintenance Officer but was later transferred from the battalion and replaced by CPT Hugh F. Boyd III. Chaplain (CPT) Charles H. Wolcott was assigned to assume spiritual duties and 2LT Richard H. Schallenberg took over as Communications Officer (and temporarily replaced by 1LT Kenneth U.H. Chun and WO1 Richard H. Lawson during the period he was on TDY to a communication course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma). WO1 Donald W. Smith and CW2 Robert C. Billman rounded out the key staff in August as Personnel Office and Supply Technician respectively. And in December, the staff was completed with the arrival of Dr. (CPT) William H. Jackson, the battalion surgeon. Company command assignments went to CPT (then 1LT) Charles E. Brings, HHC; CPT Edgar A. Marshall, A Co.; CPT John A. Sparks, B Co.; CPT Elmer J. Lyhert, C Co; and OPT David V Harbaul, D Co. While the vital spot of Sergeant Major was retained by one of the Army's senior Sergeants Major, Steven M. Dymczenski, a combat veteran of WWII and Korea and already, since his assignment in March, a veteran Mountain Mover.

By mid-August, a change in the battalion was apparent. Sure of some permanence in staff and command assignments, important decisions, put off somewhat in the formative stages of the battalion, were reached and the battalion embarked on a sweeping training program. Basic Unit Training was designed to teach the battalion members, who were already proficient in their individual skills, to work together as a team to get the job done under any and all conditions. Each company participated in those projects designed to best sharpen its capabilities.

Company 'A' took on a large project at the Post Quarry Site and was soon operating the quarry to include drilling, blasting, crushing and hauling the aggregate, which was then supplied to the Post Engineers. At the same time, a portion of the company was training in its primary role, maintaining over 400 major end items of engineer and ordnance equipment and stocking a tremendously enlarged ASL and PLL. The Equipment Platoon also got into the act as they were called to construct a Stock Pond, an unusual but profitable project for 'A' Co.

For 'B' Company, the training period meant construction work on a large scale. Three stock ponds were begun to provide earth-moving training to the company, and nearly three miles of a standard military two-way road were constructed. Other projects included repairing a pond and dam site at the Boy Scouts Camp Arrowhead; dismantling, moving, and re-erecting several 14'x52' and 28'x68' Jamesway steel buildings from HcGregor AFB to Fort Hood; maintaining a twelve mile stretch of a gravel surfaced road; and other projects, including construction of the hospital helipad.

'C' Company also received its share during the period and tackled road construction and maintenance projects, several culvert placement jobs, construction of a timber trestle bridge and others.

Company 'D' participated heavily in the program with eight culvert placement projects (to include one four barrel 36" type with concrete headwalls), two stock ponds to build, erection of a 20'x80' wood frame warehouse, construction of a concrete block latrine which required a 410 foot sewer pipe and 250 foot water line; placement of a 4" cap on all railhead siding and end ramps and construction of a class 30 timber trestle bridge with concrete bent.

Even Headquarters Company got into the act as its Water Purification team exercised their equipment and as the Utilities Section team scurried around the battalion area leaving newly painted signs, bulletin boards, free swinging doors, nicely sanded and polished floors and refinished tables in their wake.

As large and as varied as these projects were however, the most unusual and demanding was the construction of two 57'x60' maintenance buildings by 'B' and 'C' Companies opposite the PX Service Station on South Avenue and in full view of entire post. This project soon became the pride of the battalion, the permanent exhibit of a portion of its capabilities and skills and the show place for visitors on the post. When the buildings were finished they compared favorably to any building on the post. The object of these projects, and indeed of the training program itself, was to teach the battalion to operate efficiently, under the pressure of deadlines, lack of necessary materials, uncertainties of the weather, and other obstacles and to show all personnel how skills would be affected by these factors. The program was highly effective and the jobs continued throughout the year, making way for new projects which were attacked with confidence.

As the mission troops trained, the battalion headquarters was not inactive either. All staff sections collaborated on a 250-page battalion SOP that was published in 150 copies by the message center personnel. Communications, through an intra-battalion switchboard wire net, was established by the Commo Section. The S1 began to control correspondence, suspense dates and reports, not a few of which were required by the EEMO who was getting on top of the equipment situation. Personnel started to hammer down the battalion strength to authorized levels by an initially arbitrary and then considerably selective identify and transferee program. The S3 and S4 sections, who helped contribute to the posts huge electric bill by their many many hours of night work dug into their areas, the S3 working to keep the battalion busy and the S4 striving and conniving to get all equipment on hand.

Through it all, normal garrison activities were commenced; Command Information classes, Character Guidance, mandatory training, interior guard, fund drives, toy drives, blood drives and bond drives. Staff meetings and officer's calls were regularized, as was the Sergeant Major, First Sergeants' Call and the battalion settled into a less chaotic stance. Beneath all however, the subject of deployment to Vietnam was constantly discussed. Messages were arriving in to the battalion daily and many personnel assigned to the battalion were traveling to Fort Hood "for further travel to a restricted overseas area". Yet, though it was apparent that something was in the air, no official word was ever received and therefore planning was a tentative and precautionary measure. Nevertheless, preparations were underway.

In August, September and October, the entire battalion spent days at the range qualifying with individual weapons, the M14 rifle, the M60 machine gun and the .45 caliber pistol. All personnel took physicals where needed and received shots (usually whether needed or not). Company Commanders took their companies out on foot and motor marches. Physical training was conducted, Emergency Medical Care classes presented by the battalion medical section.... and who can forget the Gas Chamber? In October, the battalion ran through Fort Hood's own Vietnam Village. Convoy security was taught, booby traps examined, search and clear operations conducted and patrolling practiced. Every available minute was packed with activity as the battalion trained and received the remainder of its equipment. In short order, Mountain Movers became complete soldiers.

As the battalion was progressing, the post began to treat it with less and less of the special handling it had experienced as an infant unit. More and more details were being levied, police areas were assigned, fewer excuses were accepted for non-compliance with the regulations (which still were not all on hand), and the battalion was placed on the visitor's itinerary. As a result of this latter action, a torrent of visitors descended upon the Mountain Movers from August through the remainder of the year and the battalion was inspected by all from the lowest of West Point cadets, several of whom spent one month with the unit while on their annual orientation visit, to the highest military and civilian chiefs of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff and Secretary Stanley R. Ressor. All came to see what it was that the Mountain Movers were accomplishing...and all left with good impressions and kind words.

Then, other visitors came and for different reasons, for soon inspections were upon the battalion. Five CMMIs were conducted in quick succession with 'C' Company receiving the first of the 0400 hours phone calls. Five passing scores were the results. The Annual General Inspection was scheduled in October and for one week; inspectors examined every nook and cranny before declaring that the battalion was in satisfactory condition. By November, only one more hurdle was left, the Army Training Test and on 7 Nov, the battalion left for a 5 day FTX in preparation for the ATT. It was the first time the battalion was deployed to the field and it was good preparation for the week to follow. The ATT began and, after a four-hour road march, 900 engineers and all equipment established a bivouac area and practiced all the tasks, procedures, and plans toward which the previous month's efforts were aimed. Roads were built, bridges constructed, projects completed and in the end, the word was passed that the Mountain Movers were mission capable.

From mid-November through early December, the battalion settled down to await the New Year. Inspections and tests were behind. The last of the visitors had left. Thanksgiving had come and gone with festive mess hall dinners. Leaves were being granted. At the same time however, minor preparations were being made by the staff to respond to the movement directive whose receipt was now assured. Tasks were identified and scheduled, reporting channels established, loading plans refined and all efforts were made to anticipate the tremendous job ahead.

Then the siren sounded and on 12 Dec 1966, the battalion stiffened to react to Letter Order 12-15, III Corps and Fort Hood, which directed the deployment of the 589th Engineer Battalion to USARPAC with an Equipment Readiness Date of March 12, 1967 and a Personnel Readiness Date of March 27, 1967. On 4/29/67 the 589th arrived in Viet Nam assigned to 45th Group, 18th Brigade Cha Rang, VN on 3/68 they were Assigned to the 35th group.

They departed Phan Rang, Viet Nam on 11/1/71