

SHORT HISTORY of the 589th ENGINEER BN (CONSTRUCTION)

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1) The lineage starts in 1940, and progresses through re-designations until it became the 589th in 1947. It was designated the 589th Engr Bn (Const), 10 January 1966, and was activated at Fort Hood, Texas on 21 January 1966. It was organized, trained and deployed to Vietnam by LTC Myron D. Snoke.

2) Deployed to Qui Nhon, Vietnam in April 1967, assigned to 45th Engr Gp, w/AO vicinity of An Khe. The unit almost immediately became a small Task Force. Attached units included:

553rd Engr Co (Floating Bridge),

585th Engr Co (Dump Truck),

511th Engr Co (Panel Bridge) and a

Well Drilling Detachment.

In the words of the Meritorious Unit Commendation: "Within days after arriving in-country, the battalion began to fulfill its counterinsurgency mission by upgrading the beach and access road at the port of Qui Nhon. The four hundred-bed evacuation hospital the battalion constructed for the Republic of Korea's Tiger Division provided excellent medical facilities for this staunch ally and significantly enhanced relations between United States and Korean personnel. The unifying thread of the unit's effort was (highway) QL-19. Working in conjunction with a civilian contractor, the 589th ENGINEER BATTALION (CONSTRUCTION) transformed this rough, primitive road into a modern two-lane highway. Completion of this important project resulted in a substantial increase in the westward flow of supplies to the critical areas of Pleiku, Kon Tum, and Dak To, while simultaneously decreasing wear and tear on the vehicles utilizing the route. The most significant operational support mission undertaken by the battalion was the construction of a type II Light-lift airfield at Vinh Thanh. Characterized by the quality of the work and its remarkable durability, this facility is one of the best double bituminous surface treated airfields in Vietnam."

3) Throughout its service in Vietnam, the 589th Engineer Battalion (Construction) and attached units completed a wide variety of projects including:

- a) Airfield control towers and maintenance hangars;
- b) Electric power distribution systems;
- c) Underground bunkers for it's own use;
- d) A 40' X 100' pre-engineered steel warehouse;
- e) 35,600 square yards of M8A1 matting;
- f) Repaired enemy damage to many bridges and countless culverts;
- g) Constructed bypasses around destroyed bridges and culverts;
- h) Built a 110' double-double Bailey bridge as a by-pass;
- i) Swept for and removed numerous enemy mines;
- j) Upgraded many MACV facilities;
- k) Constructed fire bases w/guard towers and bunkers for the 5/27th Artillery Bn;
- i) Repaired damaged French Eiffel bridges;

- m) Repaired Cam Ly airfield at Dalat and constructed a POL storage and distribution system;
- n) Constructed a counter mortar radar site with supporting facilities;
- o) Built an M4T6 bridge and relocated several bridges via Heavy Lift Helicopters;
- p) Cleared thousands of acres of jungle and brush with Rome Plows;
- q) Supported the 1st Marine Division at Danang with Land Clearing;
- r) Operated water points for itself and supported units;
- s) Built revetments for Army helicopters at Phan Rang Air Base;
- t) Built a Tactical Operations Bunker at Cam Ranh Bay;
- u) Supported the 2/21 Cavalry Squadron in its area;
- v) Built access roads for remote Signal sites and other allied units in its area;
- w) Built a Bailey Bridge for the 2/21 Cavalry and replaced it after it was overloaded;
- x) Built roads over rice paddies by placing a 41" layer of sand before select fill was placed;

4) Of course there was road maintenance and construction. At times it seemed like that was the only mission, but the list above belies that misconception. There were combat roads to provide access to units it supported, maintenance of reasonably passable roads, and maintenance of roads after heavy rains and daily repair of enemy damage to roads, bridges and culverts. From its several locations, the battalion worked on the following highways:

- a) QL-19 from An Khe to the Miang Giang Pass;
- b) QL-14 north of Pleiku;
- c) QL-11 from Phan Rang to Dalat, including "Good View Pass";
- d) QL-1 from Cam Ranh Bay to Phan Thiet.

5) The battalion picked up a major workload under the Lines of Communication (LOC) program that had been initiated with civilian contractors. This work eventually led to receipt of commercial size dump trucks and other equipment under the MVA-LOC program. Rock crushers got progressively larger and asphalt plants were acquired which eventually resulted in operation of two separate Industrial Sites, one at Phan Rang and the other at Vinh Hoa. The "B" Company Industrial Site started two-shift operation in September 1970 because of the large quantities of aggregate required for both base course and asphalt by the LOC Program.

6) Throughout its service in Vietnam the Direct Support Maintenance Platoon of "A" Company worked near miracles repairing and rebuilding both Engineer and Ordnance equipment. Maintenance of the rock crushing and screening equipment was particularly difficult because of the dust created in the crushing and screening operation. Welders built up the crusher jaws and rollers nearly every night, and many diesel engines were replaced on the crushers at Phan Rang. The air intake for the primary crusher engine was eventually extended 60 feet in the air. After the battalion assumed responsibility for the LOC upgrading in its area, "A" Company did such a superb job of repairing and rebuilding asphalt paving machines that the 35th Group HQ had it do the same work for other units in the Group.

7) Enemy action against the 589th and attached units was not too heavy. Camps occasionally received mortar fire and work parties were occasionally attacked en route to and on the work sites. It was more frequent that mines of all types were discovered on the roads to and from work sites. Casualties were relatively light. But security had to be vigilant. Projects outside the unit perimeters required that the vertical construction platoons man gun-trucks. This limited the amount of repair and new construction they could accomplish. At one point in 1968, "C" Company was designated as a reaction force for the Qui Nhon area to help secure the Qui Nhon Airfield during the TET offensive. The 687th Engineer Company (Land Clearing) often lived in field locations near its work sites, and was ambushed frequently on the road to its next work area.

8) Conducting operations over such extended distances was not without problems. At one point the average enlisted strength of the battalion was 792, which was 132 below its authorization; a short time later it had only 12 of the authorized 32 Construction Supervisors. Battalion HQ moved to Phan Rang in July 1968, and various companies relocated to separate base camps as the assigned projects required. The companies had to build their own perimeter security as well as their living/fighting bunkers, maintenance and mess facilities. In 1969 the battalion was responsible for 170 km of roads, which was fairly representative of the magnitude of their responsibilities throughout. The outstanding quantity and quality of its work was a tribute to the combination of professionals and citizen soldiers.

9) Inactivated at Fort Lewis, Washington 1 November 1971.

10) Re-designated and reactivated as 589th Engr Bn (Training) 30 September 1986 @ FLW, Mo.

11) Inactivated @ FLW 25 June 1992.