

20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II

The Wavy Arrow

January 2003

Happy New Year

No concrete news yet on the location of the 2003 Reunion. Jim Waldrep is still trying to arrange a visit by president Ken Noon to Fort Bragg to determine to possibility of our meeting at or near Fort Bragg. Stay tuned for additional details. Meanwhile, we are pleased to send you this January 2003, issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, thanks to the following for having made a contribution during the past several months.

Lee L. Barbier (Medic/20) \$20.00
Henry R. Doherty (Officer) \$25.00
Cheryl Ellefson (daughter of John Horton, C/20) \$15.00
William C. Harrell (A/20) \$20.00
Santino "Smokey" Marciano (B/1340) \$20.00
Harry E. Moulder (644Topo1171 Gp) \$10.00
Domenic Pessia (C/20) \$10.00
Joseph J. Szvetitz, Jr. (C/1340) \$20.00
Roy A. Thomas (B/1340) \$100.00
Josephine Wrase (Widow) \$10.00

Even though we are no longer collecting annual membership dues, we welcome contributions from our members that permit us to publish and send the *Wavy Arrow*. See enclosed a biographical sketch of Eugene Mead Caffey by Truman H. Settlife and two articles on the 20th in Huertgen Forest by Settlife and Henry R. Doherty.

Deceased Veterans

Raymond W. Schaefer (H&S/1340) died September 26, 2002, at the age of 89 of alzheimers. He would have celebrated his 57th wedding anniversary on November 3, 2002, with his wife who writes that "he enjoyed reading the *Wavy Arrow* and gardening. A loving husband and father, he will be missed by his children and grandchildren."

James L. Stone (A/1340) died in 2002. No additional details.

Richard C. Willis (B/20) died December 13, 2002, of congestive heart failure following a stroke that he suffered a year ago. His widow has now been made an honorary member so that she will receive each future issue of the *Wavy Arrow*.

Eugene Mead Caffey (1885-1961)

By Truman H. Settlife

In my opinion, there is no single person who had a greater impact in developing the World War II 20th Engineers than did Eugene Mead Caffey. As commander of the 20th Engineer Regiment, he trained us in the States from September 1941 until May 1943, and he continued that training during two campaigns in North Africa before being ordered away in May 1943 to command an Engineer Brigade under General George Patton. My admiration for Caffey knows no bounds.

Born in Georgia on December 21, 1885, Eugene Caffey graduated from West Point in 1918 and was commissioned in the U.S. Army Engineers. He was transferred to the Judge Advocate Generals Department in 1934, and in September 1941 he was transferred back to the Engineers becoming the commanding officer of the 20th Engineers.

One day in 1941 while I was conducting close order drill at Ft. Benning, Caffey called me over to a bench and started asking me question on my background. He than stated, "If you want to learn about the Army, I will try to teach you." I responded that I would like to learn about the Army and thanked him. He never stopped trying to teach me.

After we moved to Camp Blanding, Florida, in February 1942, Caffey made me Assistant Adjutant with the specific assignment of reviewing, correcting, and updating every soldier's "Service Record." A month later, the Regimental Adjutant was reassigned to form a new unit, and under Caffey's tutelage and that of the Regimental Executive Officer, this 1st Lieutenant learned more regulations and principles of command.

Before we left Camp Blandng, the Regimental Executive Officer was assigned to form a new unit, and efforts to develop an Executive Officer among assigned Captains were unsuccessful. As we left for North Africa, Colonel Caffey decided that he would be his own Executive Officer. He advised the staff than no written orders would be issued except over the Adjutant's signature which was now my assignment. As various problems came up, Caffey would ask me, "What should we do about this?" I would give him my opinion; he would then accept or modify it with an explanation, and I would issue the order. Caffey was always teaching. Every action and experience were examined for their training value: "training and discipline accomplished with minimum casualties."

To Caffey, military discipline was simple in concept: "just do what the man says..." Discipline was indispensable to military units; without it a mission could suffer and people would die unnecessarily. In Casablanca, the 20th Engineers ran its own stockade for those who didn't follow standing orders and procedures; the stockade, surrounded by barbed wire, was called "Company Q." Those in Company Q worked longer hours and lived under conditions that were tougher than the rest of the troops experienced. After an inspection of the Regiment, including interviews with the men in Company Q. General Patton's Inspector General recommended changes making life easier for the prisoners. In the margin of the Inspector General's Report recommending changes, General Patton wrote, "Hell, No!"

This photograph of Colonel Eugene M. Caffey was taken in October 1942 at Camp Pickett, Virginia.

Initially, Caffey ordered that anyone who did not shave for two days then had to obtain his permission to shave. This helped establish the 20th Engineer Combat Regiment as different from every other outfit, and it also boosted morale. Later, Colonel Caffey ordered everyone to shave off their beards because it interfered with the wearing of gas masks.



Colonel Caffey loved the 20th Engineers as is apparent from his May 25, 1943, farewell message which reads:

"This is the thing I have dreaded more than all the Germans in hell or Germany - - to say goodbye to the brave and devoted soldiers of this Regiment, my only love in the Army. If I should to be a thousand, every day I should have something different to remember you by -- some piece of cussedness, some funny little side issue, some heart-break, some job superbly done, some deed of bravery, some act of thoughtfulness or kindness or gentleness, or maybe a grin and a good morning from some recent member of "Company Q." There is no use running on -- everybody I know in the Army knows what I think about you. I am glad I can write this and run because I could never manage to say it to you. God bless you all and bring you safely home. S/ Eugene M. Caffey, Colonel, Corps of Engineers"

At this time, I was a Captain serving as the 20th Engineer Regimental Adjutant and Executive Officer, and I drafted these remarks at Colonel Caffey's request. I had the message typed and distributed after Caffey left for his new assignment as commander of the First Engineer Special Brigade.

After World War II, Colonel Caffey was transferred back to the Judge Advocate Generals Department. In 1954, he became the Army's top legal officer, the Judge Advocate General with the rank of Major General. Caffey retired from the Army in 1956, and he died in Las Cruces, New Mexico, May 30, 1961.

The Huertgen Forest

Citizen Soldiers by Stephen E. Ambrose (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1997) describes the Huertgen Forest as "roughly fifty square miles along the German-Belgian border, within a triangle outlined by Aachen, Monschau, and Dueren. It was densely wooded with tall trees that blocked the sun, so the forest floor was dark, damp, and devoid of underbrush. The terrain is rugged, a series of ridges and deep gorges formed by the numerous streams and rivers. General Courtney Hodges of the U.S. First Army decided to drive the Germans out of the forest [and it] was fought under conditions as bad as American soldiers ever had to face, including the Wilderness [Civil War] and the Meuse-Argonne [World War I]."

The 20th and 1340th in the Huertgen Forest

By Truman H. Settlife

On October 23, 1944, both the 20th and 1340th Combat Engineer Battalions were attached to the 28th Infantry Division from Pennsylvania, "The Keystone State." Their shoulder patch was (and is) a red Keystone which led many to call them the "Bloody Bucket Division" because they had taken some beatings and would take more. On November 2, 1944, the 28th Infantry Division launched an attack and captured Schmidt and Kommerscheidt in the Huertgen Forest, suffering heavy casualties. The 20th Combat Engineer Battalion was assigned to keep the road open between Vossanack and Schmidt, while the 1340th acted as infantry to defend Kall River Bridge. However, a promised heavy machine gun unit and a forward artillery observer failed to show up.

On November 6th, strong German counterattacks drove the 28th Infantry Division from Schmidt and Vossanack. Both the 20th and 1340th Combat Engineer Battalions were committed as infantry, and both repulsed small counterattacks. One evening just before dark, a German officer under a "white flag" advised Captain Frank Bane of Company A that the Germans were going to attack later that night and suggested that the Engineers surrender to avoid more casualties. Bane responded, "Hell No," and sent the German officer on his way. We were attacked and we held. On November 9th, with snow and freezing temperatures, V Corps ordered Infantry units with supporting weapons to relieve the Engineers, and the 20th and 1340th withdrew on the night of November 10th.

The cost was very heavy. The 20th Battalion had 144 casualties of which 103 were killed, wounded, or captured. The 1340th Battalion went in with 330 officers and enlisted men and came out with 78 effective personnel. Many were killed, wounded, or captured, but most suffered from "Trench Foot," caused by prolonged exposure to wet and cold that cut off blood circulation to the feet (a form of gangrene). V Corps furnished hospital tents and some canvas cots, and we took care of our own casualties. On November 18, 1944, 28th Infantry Division commander Major General Norman "Dutch" Kota sent a letter commending the 20th and 1340th for "their untiring and unselfish devotion to duty under heavy enemy fire." As the 1340th chronicle records, "Here a separate chapter in the history of this organization was written in blood and agony."

Huertgen Forest - Fifty Years Later

By Henry R. Doherty

Last summer our family physician, Dr. Hartman, was on a trip to Omaha Beach and Utah Beach where his father had landed on D-Day. He continued his visit to other locations where World War II fighting had taken place. One of these spots was in the Huertgen Forest in the Vossanack area. A German guide was explaining the significance of the area to the tourists, one of which was our physician and three or four WWII veterans that had accompanied him on the trip. The German guide explained that the commanding officer of the American troops in that particular area was under the command of Captain Doherty.

You can imagine that our physician was very surprised and told the German tourist guide that he believed that Captain Doherty was now his patient. When Dr. Hartman returned home after his trip and told me of his experience, I assured him that I was in the Vossanack area, and that probably our troops were the ones that had been described. The tourist guide was a German World War II veteran and now in his retirement works as a tourist guide for WWII sites. I assume that the guide obtained his information from some U.S. or German World War II records. I thought that *Wavy Arrow* readers, especially those of Company A of the 20th Combat Engineers, will be interested in this story.

Bill Mauldin's Last Battle

The beloved WWII cartoonist, Bill Mauldin, faces his most formidable adversary, Alzheimers, according to a story appearing in the November 20, 2002, issue of the *Albuquerque Journal*. But he doesn't face this enemy alone. Many of his admirers visit his nursing home in Orange County, California, and letters from thousands of WWII veterans pay homage to the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist.

Since Mauldin's family cannot handle the large volume of mail, the cartoonist for the *Orange County Register* acts as a clearing house. Thus mail to Bill Mauldin should be sent to Gordon Dillow at 625 N. Grand Avenue, Santa Ana, CA 92701.

In his 1945 book, entitled *Up Front*, Mauldin admitted that he "doesn't know how engineers bolt braces on Bailey bridges or the finer points of neutralizing a Teller mine," and Mauldin felt that the cartoon (shown on the right) would only be fully appreciated by World War II engineers.



"Don't hurry for me, son. I like to see young men take an interest in their work."

News and Notes

Santino "Smokey" Marciano (B/1340) writes: "I was so happy to get the *Wavy Arrow* and to learn that the Virginia Beach Reunion was a success. I wish that I could have been there, but due to my health it is impossible. I called Ed Lutz but felt sad to learn that he is not well; he is a wonderful person." (See page one for recognition of a contribution.)

Sue Pessia (wife of Domenic Pessia, C/20) writes: "Dom fell off the roof, about 15 feet, but being the tough 20th engineer that he is, he didn't get hurt; only a few bruises. We miss everyone and enjoy reading the *Wavy Arrow*. It's a great newsletter. (See page one for recognition of a contribution.)

Maryellen Szvetitz-Eichelbaum, daughter of Joseph J. Szvetitz, Jr. (C/1340), writes: "Dad fell and broke his right elbow early in 2002 and his arm is still healing. In May he went to live in an assisted living facility near my home." (See new mailing address below, and recognition of a contribution on page one.)

Roy A. Thomas (B/1340) writes: "I do a little fishing with my sons, and my wife and I take walks to the lake when the weather is good. Otherwise we sit by the fireplace keeping nice and cozy. I very much enjoy the news in the *Wavy Arrow*." (See page one for recognition of a contribution.)

New Addresses

Clarence O. Magee (Officer) has a modified address which is now 3004 Jackson Street, Suite F, Alexandria, LA 71301-4745.

Maureen Melly (Widow) now resides at 140 East Peters Lane, Aston, PA. 19014-1466.

Joseph J. Szvetitz, Jr. (C/1340) now resides at The Village at Sullivan Trail, Room 320, 2222 Sullivan Trail, Easton, PA 18040.

Missing

Andrew L. Harvey (H&S/20) no longer resides at 529 West P. Street, Oakdale, CA, 95361. Does anyone know his whereabouts?

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The 20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II has a new Website.
<http://www.geocities.com/dodimae2001/20thCombatEngineerofWWII.html>

Send items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 2501 Drexel Street, Vienna, VA 22180.