

20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II

The Wavy Arrow

January 2008

20th/1171st Chaplain Alton Carpenter

Anne Eiland

My father, Captain Alton E. Carpenter, was assigned to be the chaplain for the 20th Engineers when it was still in Florida. He served in that position until the end of the war. When my father returned home, he often talked about his years overseas, but he never mentioned that he had kept a diary during those years with the 20th/1171st. I was an adult before I learned of his diary, and I had a hard time persuading him to let me share it with others. As a professional writer, I wanted to see it put into a readable format and managed to get him to work with me. He also had many maps, numerous letters, and photographs, all of which he allowed me to use with the diary. Before his death in 1993, we spent many hours sitting on the deck of his home reading through the diary and talking about the people and events of those years in Europe. I know that I am blessed to have had that time with him and grateful that he allowed me to put his experiences into manuscript format. It has recently been published by Mead Publishers of Mesa, Arizona, under the title of *Chappie, World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain*. The book is dedicated to the men of the 20th/1171st, especially those who did not come back.

"This is my dad's story, but I know that each man in the 20th has their own story to tell. Those years took a big chunk out of each man's life and forever changed them. For those of you who have not yet written of your own experiences, I hope that you will do so in order that it will not be lost for your children, grand-children, and those to come. I know that many of you have shared through the *Wavy Arrow* and that is wonderful. Just keep them coming."

Chappie, World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain

Your editor has recently received a copy of this book that records the diary of Captain Alton E. Carpenter who served as chaplain to the 20th/1340th/1171st Combat Engineers from the invasion of North Africa to VE Day in Czechoslovakia. Excerpts from this diary will be published in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow*. However, those who want to obtain a copy of this 240-page book can order one for \$21.50 postpaid from Anne Eiland, P.O. Box 51851, Mesa, AZ 85208.

Lost But Not Forgotten

Madison Ray Broome (C/20th) died June 2, 2007. Ray entered the U.S. Army on February 24, 1941, and after joining the 20th Engineers, he worked his way up to First Sergeant in Company C. After WWII, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force where he served as Chief Master Sergeant until he retired in 1969. His widow, Margaret, tells us that Ray had been declining in health for the last three years.

Nurse Maribel Dorton Auld

In the March 2006 issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, you have read about the marriage on February 2, 1945, in Sart le Spa, Belgium, between John Auld (executive officer of the 1340th) and Maribel E. Dorton (nurse with the U.S. 3rd Army Auxiliary Surgical Group). We are sad to report that Nurse Maribel Dorton Auld died October 12, 2007, one week before her 96th birthday. As a nurse, Maribel served on a neuro-surgical team in North Africa and Sicily providing front-line surgery to the most seriously wounded with head and spinal injuries.

On November 11, 1943, both the 20th Engineers and the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group set sail on the Dutch-operated *USAT Sloterdijk* for a 16-day voyage to England. By happenstance, Maribel and John were assigned seats at the same table in the same dining room. This was their first meeting in a social setting. Romance blossomed and before the voyage was over, they agreed to get married. While in England, Maribel took every possible opportunity to see John. But thoughts of a Maribel - John Auld wedding had to be placed on the back burner for the Normandy invasion. It wasn't until January 1945 that arrangements could be made to hold the wedding in a huge, unheated, old stone church in Sart le Spa, Belgium, on February 2, 1945.

Truman Setiffe walked Maribel down the aisle at the Belgium wedding. John Auld reciprocated on May 19, 1948, in New York City when he was best man for Truman Setliffe's wedding to Dorothea Marchard. John Auld died in June 1979, and Maribel moved to Sacramento, California, to live with her daughter. At her request, Maribel was buried beside John Auld in Indiana, Pennsylvania. Maribel is survived by her daughter Jennifer, her son Jim Auld and family, her sister Marion Sanson, and numerous grandchildren.

Larry G. Prentiss (Son-in-law of Charles Petree, A/20th) writes: "I regret to inform you of the passing of Lillian H. Petree, widow of Charles Petree on October 6, 2007. She would pass on the *Wavy Arrow* to me, her son-in-law to read. I found the articles of interest and she told us of places where Charles had been during WWII. Enclosed find a check in memory of Lillian."

Address Change

George F. Rankin (C/20th): New address: 11414 West Cottonwood Lane, Avondale, AZ 85392-4234. George Rankin served as secretary-treasurer of the 20th Combat Engineer Association of WWII for 26 years from 1963 to 1989.

Another Look at the Sicilian Campaign

As reported in our history, the 20th boarded LCIs in Bizerte harbor on July 5, 1943, and pulled out on July 6 around Cape Bone to Souse where the 20th disembarked for a short but torrid march. As the LCIs pulled out once again, they were informed that they were part of Operation HUSKY. They passed within sight of Malta on July 9 during a gale storm and heavy seas, and landed near Licata, Sicily, with the U.S. Third Infantry Division on July 10, 1943.

We now know more about the invasion from a brand new book entitled *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, by Rich Atkinson (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2007). Here are selected portions of this book in the words of the author (in italics).

The next Anglo-American blow after victory in North Africa had been decided by Roosevelt and Churchill five months earlier in Casablanca. Operation HUSKY was summarized as "an attack against Sicily will be launched in 1943 with the target date as the period of the favorable July moon." The detailed HUSKY plan was approved May 12. It would be the largest amphibian operation of World War II; the seven divisions in the assault wave (three American, three British, and one Canadian) were two more than would land at Normandy eleven months later.

On July 5 the invasion armada began to assemble and by noon Friday, July 9, as the fleet drew near Malta, the wind had freshened from the west, turning the sea a forbidding hue and sculpturing crests from the wavelets. By late afternoon the wind reached a gale force, and one-by-one the barrage balloon cables snapped and soon two dozen balloons sailed up and out of sight.

Eisenhower reviewed his options and quickly decided that "the operation will proceed as scheduled."

The first Americans waded onto the beaches at 3:35 a.m., on Saturday, July 10. Several LCIs that had been snagged on sandbars thirty yards from shore began to ferry men and weapons to the beach on rubber boats. The 1st and 45th Infantry Divisions landed near Gela where mines proved more galling than enemy guns. Drivers ignored the engineer laid tape to mark cleared lanes, and many vehicles blew up. Fifteen miles west the 3rd Infantry Division landed near Licata. A few desultory Italian artillery shells greeted the invaders who found the beaches unmined. Booby traps on the docks were still in their packing crates. Dawn revealed a U.S. flag flapping on a hill above Licata. At 9:30 a.m., the fleet signaled, "Hold all gunfire. Objective taken." However, at noon ten German dive-bombers attacked the ships off Licata, straddling half-a-dozen LSTs with bombs and setting fire to another. Dive-bomber continued to attack the ships and strafe the troops on the beach.

The history of the 20th then goes on to take note of the disaster that took place as U.S. transports flying in paratroopers were caught in a withering fire from both the ships at sea and the troops on the beachhead as the transports crossed the shore. Very few histories of events in Sicily even mention this disaster that most 20th veterans remember. However, this new book provides details that need to be told. Here is how Rick Atkinson describes them in his *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*.

Plans were set for 2,300 men of the 82nd Airborne Division to reinforce the troops on the ground by jumping from 144 planes before

midnight of Sunday, July 11. However, notice failed to reach thousands at sea and on land. A particularly vicious Axis attack hit the anchorage at 9:50 p.m. that left the troops jumpy. The lead C-47 arrived over the beach at 10:40 p.m. with amber belly lights flashing. Then the rapping of a single machine gun broke the tranquility and a stream of red tracers used by U.S. forces lighted the night sky. The contagion spread in an instant. Fountains of red fire erupted from the beaches and the anchorage. Formations disintegrated. Some pilots flipped off their belly lights and tried to thread a path along the shore between fire from the ships and from the beach. Others fled for Africa chased by tracers. The final formation was hit the hardest with half shot down. At last the shooting ebbed, the guns fell silent, and the awful epiphany seeped across the beachhead and through the fleet.

Twenty-three planes had been destroyed, and another 37 were badly damaged. Investigators put the casualties at 410. The mission had been a fiasco, among the worst friendly-fire episodes in modern warfare. When Eisenhower arrived at the beachhead on Monday morning, July 12th, no one during his day-long visit thought to enlighten him. Only after Eisenhower returned to his command post late Monday night did he learn of the airborne calamity. At 11:45 p.m., Eisenhower dictated a scathing message to Patton demanding that he initiate an exhaustive investigation with a view to fixing responsibilities. Various investigations would go forth but no blame was ever formally assigned. Pentagon censorship kept the incident secret until many months after the Sicilian campaign ended.

This book goes on to tell us that:

If the campaign against the Axis was going well enough, a new front had opened between the British and the Americans. This battle hindered the struggle for Sicily and would

impinge on the rest of the war. Montgomery was in the middle of the broughhaha. Only two roads hugging the island's east and west coast led to the ultimate prize of Messina, and the British claimed both. Ridge by ridge, road by road, town by town, the island fell to the advancing Allied armies. Montgomery's right wing stalled for more than two weeks at Catania. Enemy demolitions made the bad terrain even worse. An estimated 160 bridge spans were blown up in the American sector. As both Patton and Montgomery were closing in on Messina, 12,000 German troops and 4,000 vehicles slipped out of Sicily across the Messina peninsula, The promised B-17s never came, and Allied commanders had no coordinated plan for severing the Messina Strait. At ten a.m. on August 17, Patton arrived on the windswept heights west of Messina. Before noon the entire First Division marched into the amphitheater along the Palma River. By the time a colonel from Montgomery's 4th Armored Brigade arrived with bagpipes in the back of his jeep, the Yanks had staked their claim.

This book does not tells us that on August 1, 1943, the first battalion of the 20th moved to Cefalu where they built a Bailey railroad bridge to ease the supply of the 3rd and 45th divisions, both of which were encountering delaying action by the Germans along the northern coastal road from Palermo to Messina.

Meanwhile, the second battalion of the 20th was transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division to assist in clearing out the eastern half of the island where they took thousands of Italian prisoners who had no fight left in them. They entered Trapani on July 28 where they rebuilt the airport. As the Sicilian campaign was drawing to a close, the entire 20th was engaged in replacing dozens of bridges blown by the retreating Germans.

As Ernie Pyle wrote, "Sicily was an engineer's war."

Assault on Omaha Beach

Bernard McDonnell (20th Regimental Adjutant) tells us that Company A of the 20th Engineer Battalion was impounded under complete security before D-Day as part of an independent brigade to support the 16th regiment of the Big Red One. Together with Company A of the First Engineer Combat Unit, they landed on Omaha Beach as described by Stephen Ambrose in *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climatic Battle of World War II*.

Raymond R. Davis (A/20th) shares with us his experiences in landing on Omaha Beach. "As we were heading for the beach, our skipper saw a landing craft that was sinking. He pulled beside the landing craft and took aboard a group of Rangers to save them from drowning. As this was taking place, a German 88 fell to the left of us so the skipper cut the cable that had been tied to the sinking landing craft. After another 88 hit on our left, the skipper moved back away from the beach and we had lost our chance of landing on D-Day. The next day we headed back to the beach. When the ramp went down, I started down with my jeep but the motor stalled. Luckily there was a two-and-a-half-ton truck behind me which pushed my jeep up on the beach and the push started the motor of my jeep. Once ashore, we started clearing out mines on the beach."

Bronze Star For Stealing Vehicle

2nd Lt. Joseph Alter (B Company, 1340th) volunteered to assist in the evacuation of wounded in the Hurtgen Forest on November 8, 1944. As he was looking for a vehicle, he passed through the village of Vossenack where he found a weasel (a light-weight vehicle on wide tracks) which was perfect to travel over a foot a snow that had fallen. He asked the medical personnel in the church who had possession of the vehicle to accompany him but they refused to cross the open meadows to get to the wounded. An enemy barrage started and the medics rushed into the basement of the church. Since a weasel steers with two levers like a bulldozer which any engineer can operate, it was too tempting to resist and off he went on the weasel. When the medics heard the weasel start up they rushed out of the cellar cussing but they were too late to stop the weasel. Alter then delivered medical supplies to the engineers that were serving as infantry and through heavy artillery fire he evacuated four seriously wounded soldiers.

The following day Alter used the weasel to guide a group delivering water and rations, and on November 10th Alter used the weasel to deliver orders from V Corps for the 20th and 1340th battalion to withdraw from its position under cover of darkness. Alter was not wounded but during this period, eleven were killed and about sixty were wounded. Eventually Alter returned the weasel to the medics.

1340th commander Truman Setliffe recommended a Bronze Star for Alter's "disregard for his personal safety" and it was officially granted by V Corps headquarters on March 10, 1945. In the citation, the words "stole the weasel" were revised to read "acquired the weasel" and there were no repercussions for the theft. Alter concludes this story by stating, "Honest, I never again stole anything that valuable."

Letters From Our Veterans

Charles D. Libby (H&S/20th) writes: "I have been reading the articles about Colonel Edmund Daley in the *Wavy Arrow*. They stirred up a lot of memories and sixty years hasn't diminished them. I especially remember our voyage on the *Sloterdyke* bound for Scotland. Does anyone remember the beef tongue that the Dutchmen fed us. I lived on cream of wheat during that voyage. I really appreciate reading these stories in the *Wavy Arrow*.

Donald M. Wharff (Warrant Officer) writes: "I joined the 20th Engineer Regiment at Ft. Benning after a semester at college in Des Moines, Iowa. I was freshly out of basic training, and as I stood in a line with twenty other recruits, Colonel Eugene Caffey asked if anyone can use a typewriter. Harry Staikoff and I stepped forward, and we were both assigned to H&S Company of the 20th Combat Engineers. I subsequently became personnel manager with the rank of Staff Sergeant and eventually as Warrent Officer in the 1340th Engineer Battalion under command of Truman Setliffe while in England getting ready for the Normandy invasion. I have always thought that possibly my ability to type may have saved my life."

Wavy Arrow Contributions

We thank the many people listed below for having made a contribution to keep the *Wavy Arrow* coming to you on a regular basis.

Joseph Alter (Officer, B/1340th)	\$25.00
Margaret Broome (Widow of Madison Ray Broome, C/20th)	\$25.00
Edmund "Mick" Daley (Son of 20th Commanding Officer Daley)	\$50.00
Raymond R. Davis (A/20th)	\$25.00
Stephen Drevicky (C/1340th)	\$25.00
Anne Eiland (Daughter of Alton Carpenter, 20th Chaplain)	\$50.00
Thomas A. Kerns (A/1340th)	\$25.00
Joseph H. Kleinfeld (H&S 20th)	\$25.00
Michael Langheim (Son of Vernie Langheim, B/1340th)	\$20.00
Charles D. Libby (H&S/20th)	\$50.00
Bernard P. McDonnell (20th Regimental Adjutant)	\$50.00
Larry G. Prentiss (Son-in-law of Charles Petree, A/20th)	\$25.00
Truman Setliffe (1340th Commander)	\$100.00
George Spivey (A/20th)	\$25.00
Emanuel J. Wasinger (A/1340th)	\$25.00
Donald M. Wharff (Warrant Officer)	\$25.00
Catherine Wilson (Widow of Ernest Wilson, Officer)	\$100.00

Send Contributions, Letters, Articles, Photographs, Obituaries, and other News Items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 2501 Drexel Street, Vienna, VA 22180.