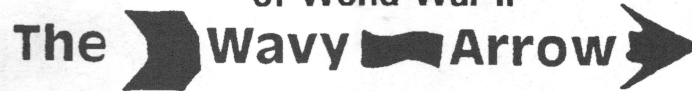


# 20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II



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February 2009

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## Vehicles Used By the 20th Engineers

In the last issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, we described the Landing Craft used by the 20th Combat Engineers. Now let's take a look at the land vehicles that were employed.

### Trucks

During World War II, the 20th Engineers traveled thousands of miles in the backs of General Motors Corporation (GMC) trucks. The most widely used was the GMC model CCKW350, a two-and-a-half ton truck called the "Deuce-and-a-half" by the GIs. The first trucks deployed by the 20th Engineers in North Africa and Sicily were fitted with three driving axles supplied by Chevrolet Gear and Axle Brakes. These trucks also included a 3-caliber machine gun mounted in an opening over the cab. While in England awaiting the Normandy invasion, the 20th and 1340th received the cargo/troop carrier type. Most had dump bodies permitting the engineers to load, move, and dump rock to maintain the roads. A winch platform was affixed on some of the trucks. After the Battle of the Bulge was contained, GMC trucks with winches were employed to reopen roads by pulling the bombed German vehicles off the roads. The 20th also had access to GMC trucks with air compressors. Over 6,000 cargo GMC trucks played a major role in the "Red Ball Express" carrying critical supplies from the Normandy beachheads to the U.S. forces advancing to Germany. More than 800,000 of all varieties were produced by General Motors during World War II.

### Jeeps

The first prototype of this four-wheel-drive vehicle (the *Bantam BRC*) was built in 1940 for the U.S. Army by American Bantam Car Company of Butler, Pennsylvania. But it did not meet the Army's weight and motor requirements. Since Bantam was too small to supply the number needed, the government allowed Willys-Overland and Ford to develop an acceptable vehicle. Willys-Overland chief engineer made extensive design changes and won the initial contract. Thus in November 1940, the *Willys Model MB* military vehicle became the prototype of the celebrated Jeep and they commenced building them at their plant in Toledo, Ohio. However, the military was concerned about their ability to produce the large quantities needed, so the U.S. government required that jeeps also be built by the Ford Motor Company. Ford designated their vehicle as *Model GPW* (G for governmental vehicle, P for its 80-inch wheelbase, and W for the Willys design). Ford and Willys combined produced 639,000 jeeps during World War II.

(Read on to see how the Jeep got its name)



20th and 1340th Engineers Traveled  
Thousands of Miles In GMC Trucks



Wavy Arrow Editor Driving  
A Jeep in January 1945

There are several explanations on the origin of the name of the Jeep. The most popular came from the abbreviation **GP** (Government or General Purpose) which was slurred into the word *Jeep*. Early in 1941, Willys-Overland demonstrated the vehicles's off-road capacity. The February 20, 1941, *Washington Daily News* reported, "With Senator Meade of New York, at the wheel, and Representative Thomas of New Jersey beside him, one of America's new scout cars, known as *jeeps*, climbs up the Capitol steps in a demonstration." This publicity settled the name for this vehicle that became the primary light four-wheel-drive car of the U.S. Army and allies during World War II. As evidence that they were used for General Purposes, 20th Chaplain Carpenter used the hood of his Jeep as the altar for the many services he held near the front lines.

### Bulldozers

The Bulldozer was the basic tool of the combat engineers for maintaining roads and construction of bridges. These tractors with a powerful engine, caterpillar tracks, and a curved shovel-like blade at the front were produced by Caterpillar as *Model D7*. Each line company of the 20th and 1340th had its own bulldozer. One unforgettable example of their use took place in the Huertgen Forest when a 20th Engineer bulldozer battled to keep open the Kall River Bridge. Since the Bulldozer was too slow to travel on its own as the allies advanced through Europe, they had to be transported on a trailer pulled a GMC truck. Caterpillar manufactured some 10,000 *Model D7* Bulldozers from 1940 to 1944, and they were truly the mechanical heroes of the war.

### Half-Tracks

These vehicles were used over rough ground where the traction provided by rear tracks was greater than could be provided by trucks. Half-tracks were produced by Autocar Company, Diamond T Motor Company, International Harvester, and White Company. While used primarily by infantry and armored divisions, they were also used by engineers. For example, the commander of 1340th Company A had to borrow a half-track from the infantry to get close enough to remove a road block that was under small-arms fire, and then supervise the construction on June 9, 1944, of the first bridge on the Normandy bridgehead .



**Combat Engineers Use A Bulldozer To Remove German Vehicles  
To Open Roads In Snowy Ardennes After Battle of the Bulge**

### **Weasels**

The M29 Weasel, built by Studebaker, was a small vehicle with wide tracks designed specifically for operation in the snow. They were not assigned to the engineers, but as 2nd Lt. Joseph Alter (B Company, 1340th) described in an earlier issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, he stole one to assist the engineers in the Huertgen Forest. As he was passing through the village of Vossenack on November 8, 1944, he saw a weasel that belonged to medical personnel. He asked the medics if they would accompany him to recover wounded engineers, but they refused. An enemy barrage started and the medics took refuge into the basement of a church. Since a weasel was easy to operate, this was too tempting to resist and Alter took off on the weasel to deliver medical supplies to the engineers. The following day, Alter used the weasel to guide a group delivering water and rations, and on November 10th he delivered orders from V Corps for the 20th and 1340th battalions to withdraw from its position under cover of darkness. The weasel was eventually returned to the medics and there were no repercussions for the theft. Alter concluded, "Honest, I never again stole anything that valuable."

### **More Stories Needed**

Veterans, please share with us other experiences you had with vehicles used by the 20th and 1340th Engineers. **We need more stories from veterans and others for the next issue of the *Wavy Arrow*.** Unless we receive more stories, we may have to reduce the number of issues of the *Wavy Arrow* that we print and mail each year.

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.

## Letters About Our Veterans

**Cathy Duell (Daughter of Carl Brenot, A/20th)** writes: "My father has been critically ill this past year. He is bedridden with Parkinsons, and requires 24/7 care. He loved attending all but two or three of the Reunions, and enjoys the *Wavy Arrow* which I still read to him. He is now at home with us at 25055 Stizerville Road, Cochran, PA 16314.

**Bernard McDonnell (20th Regimental Adjutant)** writes: "My health has recently improved after a year of bad "falls," thanks to the help of visiting therapists who see me three times a week. I am now living with my daughter, Kathy, and her husband, both of whom are retired. You can contact me at 22755 South Woodview Lane, Beaver Creek, OR 97004. I'd love to hear from you. Please accept the enclosed check to help with the publication and postage for mailing the *Wavy Arrow*."

**Henry L. Smith (Officer)** writes: "While I am in good health, I face the problems of old age. Because of the hurricanes in Florida, I have moved to Virginia, and my mail should be sent to 12191 Clipper Drive, Apartment #234, Lake Ridge VA 22192." {**Editor's Note:** Two years ago we published in the *Wavy Arrow*, the following explanation from Henry Smith which explains his concern about hurricane. "Last summer Hurricane Charlie ripped into my community and badly damaged about 25 percent of my mobile home which is located about 20 miles from Punta Gorda where massive damage was done. Then Hurricane Francis took off the front of my mobile home. I figured that somebody was trying to tell me something, so I took off for Virginia where I stayed for about five weeks until the hurricane season was over.")

**Betty T. Powell (Widow of Robert Powell, B/20)** writes: "My husband, Bob, looked forward every year to the Reunions and seeing all of his buddies, It was the highlight of the year for him. I am enjoying the newsletters. I then pass each issue of the *Wavy Arrow* on to my oldest son who also has his daddy's World War II memorabilia.

## Wavy Arrow Contributions

We thank the following for having made a contribution to keep the *Wavy Arrow* coming to you on a regular basis. Please consider one if you haven't made a contribution recently.

<b>Cathy Duell (Daughter of Carl Brenot, A/20th)</b> . . . . .	\$20.00
<b>Bernard McDonnell (20th Regimental Adjutant)</b> . . . . .	\$50.00
<b>Neysa A. Miller (Widow of Frederick Miller, H&amp;S/20th)</b> . . . . .	\$25.00
<b>Steve Poulos (B/20th)</b> . . . . .	\$25.00
<b>Betty T. Powell (Widow of Robert Powell, B/20)</b> . . . . .	\$40.00
<b>Truman H. Setliffe (1340th Commander)</b> . . . . .	\$50.00
<b>Henry L. Smith (Officer)</b> . . . . .	\$100.00
<b>John Q. Webster (Officer)</b> . . . . .	\$50.00
<b>Irene Zemba (Widow of Andrew Zemba, B/20th)</b> . . . . .	\$25.00