

# 20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II



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August 2013  
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## Lost But Not Forgotten

### Dr. James Zimmerman (1919-2013)

Dr. James Zimmerman (Captain, 1171<sup>st</sup> Group Combat Engineers) was born May 8, 1919, and graduated from the Indiana Dental School in 1943. He was then immediately drafted into the Army. After completing basic training, he departed from New York on the Queen Mary. Upon arriving in Great Britain, he joined the 1171<sup>st</sup> Combat Engineers as a dental surgeon, receiving five battle stars for his service from the Normandy invasion on June 10<sup>th</sup> to V.E. Day on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1945 in Czechoslovakia. After the war, he settled in Nappanee, Iowa, where he began his dental practice lasting 44 years. He was a charter member of the 20<sup>th</sup> association in 1948 and attended eight reunions. He married Dorothy Ritter in 1951 and they had two children. His daughter, Jean Zimmerman Barger, who lives with her husband in Fort Worth, Texas, tells us that her dad was an avid reader and had numerous hobbies. "Although dad didn't like talking about his war experiences, he would share stories with school children who were researching school projects." Dr. Zimmerman died May 22, 2013 and was buried with honors. His daughter also tells us how she found so useful the book *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain*. She says, "It follows the same path as my dad's from Normandy until the end of the war. Many of my dad's letters home to his parents made reference to Chappie. I am grateful to Anne Eland for publishing the book since it helps bring my dad's letters to life

### Joseph Alter (1923-2013)

Joseph Alter (2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., B Company, 1340<sup>th</sup>) was born May 30, 1923. He was assigned to Company B of the 1340<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion in England just in time to participate in the June 7, 1944, invasion of Normandy at Omaha Beach. He 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 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 in fear of being wounded. An enemy barrage started and the medics rushed into the basement of the church. It was too tempting to resist and off he went on the weasel. After he delivered medical supplies to the engineers who were serving as infantry and through heavy artillery fire, he evacuated four seriously wounded soldiers. Alter received a Bronze Star for his effort that "disregarded his personal safety." After the war he sold products for Gulf Petroleum. He attended his first reunion in 1989, and after the death of his wife in 1999, he visited the Normandy beaches. He was living at 3040 N.W. 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Delray Beach, Florida, when he died June 12, 2013.

## Wedding Bells During WWII

Cupid would not let anything or anybody, not even a World War, to keep her from fostering Love and Marriage. You may recall reading Jennifer Auld's letter in a recent issue of the *Wavy Arrow*. Jennifer described how her father, John G. Auld, Executive Officer of the 1340th Combat Engineer Battalion, and her mother, Maribel Dorton Auld, a nurse with the U.S. Army Auxiliary Surgical Group in North Africa and Europe met on the Dutch operated *USAT Sloterdijk* traveling from Sicily to Scotland in November 1943. They finally found time to get married on February 2, 1945, in Sart le Spa, Belgium. This wedding is described in detail with photographs in *Chappie: World War II Diary of a Combat Chaplain* since Chaplain Alton Carpenter officiated at the wedding.

Now we have another WWII marriage to report. Edna A. McCauley describes how her father, Lt. George E. Horn, Company B, 20th Combat Engineer Regiment, met her mother, Grace Hand, who was serving in the Army Nurse Corps. This meeting took place in 1942 at Camp Picket, Virginia, shortly before George Horn departed in November 1942 with the 20th Regiment for North Africa, and on to the July 10, 1943, invasion of Sicily. Meanwhile, Grace was transferred to the 50th General Hospital located in Scotland. As fate would have it, the 20th Combat Engineers shipped to England permitting the couple to meet again in England in January 1944 where they decided to get married. On April 3, 1944, Grace took a train from Scotland to Taunton in Somerset, England, where they were married the following day at the Methodist Church in Taunton.



*George and Grace Horn  
Were Married April 3,  
1944, At Taunton, England*

George Horn served as Captain of B Company, 20<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers Regiment and was wounded in North Africa on May 17, 1943, and was wounded again in the Hurtgen Forest on November 8, 1944. Even though George remained in the military service after V.E. Day, he was elected in 1947 as the first chairman of the newly organized 20th Combat Engineer Association of WWII. He returned to Fort Leonard Woods in Missouri in 1953 as a Major and agreed to serve as Secretary-Treasurer of the Association in 1955. He held this position until January 1956 when he was transferred to Germany as executive officer of the 17th Armored Engineer Division. George died of a heart attack while in Germany on October 4, 1956. In August 1957, Mrs. Grace Horn was elected as one of the first honorary members of the 20th Combat Engineer Association of WWII. Mrs. Grace Horn died December 10, 2010, at the age of 95, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery next to her husband. Their daughter, Edna A. McCauley, resides at 192 Harvest Run Road North, State College, PA 16801.

## Hurtgen Forest

### Who Was Responsible for the Disaster?

Rick Atkinson, author of *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe 1944-1945* provides another analysis of the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest, this time from the Generals involvement. The First Army was the largest American fighting force in Europe, and its commander was Lt. General Courtney Hodges, an old school-soldier who flunked out at West Point. "He believed it "safer, sounder, and in the end quicker to keep smashing ahead." Facing the First Army was an eleven miles long and five miles wide Hurtgen Forest with deep ravines and trees so thick that even at midday sunlight barely penetrated. Hodges already had experiences in the Hurtgen Forest when in late September the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division tried to cross the forest in an effort to outflank the capture of Aachen. The lesson learned was that the Hurtgen Forest neutralized U.S. Military advantages in armor, artillery, air-power, and mobility. But Hodges was convinced that no First Army drive to the Roer without securing the forest and capturing Schmidt.

To launch the attack, Hodges selected Major General Norman Dutch Cota and his 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Foul weather, supply shortages, and the slow arrival of tow more divisions required the First Army to postpone until mid-November the main attack toward Duren on the Roer River. But Hodges saw no reason to delay clearing the Hurtgen Forest and seizing Schmidt. He assured Dutch Cota that the battle plan was "excellent." In fact it was flawed. For two weeks across the 170-mile front of the First and Ninth Armies, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division would be the only U.S. unit launching an attack, attracting the undivided attention of the German defenders. The "excellent" battle plan imposed by Major General Leonard Gerow, commander of V Corps, required Dutch Cota to attack on three divergent sections of the Hurtgen.

Dutch Cota launched the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division into the Hurtgen Forest at nine a.m., November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment encountered a large mine field which delayed their progress, while the 110<sup>th</sup> Regiment met strong resistance suffering heavy casualties. However the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment

reached Vossenack the first day, and captured Schmidt the second day. Telephone congratulations from division and corps commanders poured into Cota's head-quarters and the plaudits made Cota feel like "a little Napoleon." However this was short-lived. At day-break November 4<sup>th</sup> heavy artillery and mortar barrage hit the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment who were guarding Schmidt. Then five Mark IVs entered Schmidt firing directly into the foxholes. With no Sherman tanks nearby, the infantrymen fired bazooka rounds at the tanks, but they bounced off the armor like tennis balls. This panicked the Americans who retreated into the forest seeking safety. By ten a.m. Schmidt belonged to the Reich. It all went from bad to worse, including for the Engineers (20<sup>th</sup>, 146<sup>th</sup>, and 1340<sup>th</sup> Battalions) who were ordered to serve as riflemen because of the high casualty rate in the Infantry Regiments. More details Battles: on the military activities can be found in *Three Ardenne, Altuzzo, and Schmidt* by Charles B. MacDonald and Sidney T. Mathews, Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1952. However, Cecil Currey in *Follow Me and Die*, Stein & Day, New York, 1984, didn't hesitate to place blame.

In less than six months, Dutch Cota had gone from a hero at Omaha Beach to a defeated general on the brink of dismissal. Cota's gravest mistake was his willingness to accede to demands of his superiors without protest when they gave him flawed orders. He was permitted to keep his command because so many other leaders had been lost in the division. It was Generals Gerow and Hodges who were responsible for the disaster. In battle all activity must be directed toward a single, clearly defined goal. Gerow gave Cota three objectives, one for each of his regiments. This scattered the regiments so that the 28<sup>th</sup> no longer had the strength to hold Schmidt after occupying it. General Hodges must also bear a burden for the slaughter at Schmidt. He was senior in command to both Gerow and Cota. He saw their plans and he pronounced himself satisfied. Their failures were his as well, for it is long-established military doctrine that the senior in command is always responsible for both success and failure.



## Another Living 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer

Meet Archibald J. Howard who joined C Company, 20<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion in England. He is listed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Directory as Archie Howard. Here is a photo of Archie seated on the porch of his home in Kingwood, Texas. The photo was taken by his uncle, William Howard, who has been trying to compile more information on Archie. This is difficult because he does not want to talk about his wartime experiences. We have learned that after V.E. Day, Archie served with the U.S. occupation forces. He visited Normandy on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day and was impressed by the 20<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers Memorial on Omaha Beach. You can contact Archie by writing to him at 26868 Palace Pines, Kingwood, TX 77329.



### 20<sup>th</sup> Engineers Memorial

Anne Eiland, editor of her father's diary called Chappie, recently visited Omaha Beach, Normandy, with daughter and granddaughter, Jenni & Becca, to see the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineers Memorial. The plaque at the top honoring the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1340<sup>th</sup>, & 1171<sup>st</sup> Combat Engineers was designed by Capt. Ed Lutz and installed on the First Infantry Division Memorial during a September 23 to October 8, 1993, tour of the WWII battle fields

### Wavy Arrow Contributions

We thank the following for making a contribution to keep the *Wavy Arrow* coming to you.

Jean Barger (Daughter of Captain James Zimmerman 1171 <sup>st</sup> )	\$ 20.00
Edna McCauley (Daughter of Captain George E. Horn & Grace K. Horn)	\$100.00
Bruce Porter (Commander 20th Engineers 1994-1996)	\$ 25.00
Irene H. Zemba (Widow of Andrew Zemba, B/20th)	\$ 25.00

Send Letters, Articles, Photographs, Obituaries, and other News Items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 12226 Cathedral Drive, Woodbridge, Virginia 22191-2232. His telephone number is 1-703-966-1739, and his e-mail address is <[gbriffenhagen@gmail.com](mailto:gbriffenhagen@gmail.com)>.