William Edward Bacon

William E. Bacon was born in 1918 in Billings Montana to mother Wilda Sears Bacon and Edward K. Bacon. His father was a salesman. Wilda and Edward were married on 20 April 1910. His father served in WWI, having grown up in Kentucky. It seems as though his parents divorced. William Edward was the second of two children. His older sister is five years older. Her name was Eleanor.

His mother, Wilda, was born in Denver CO and married Charles Reed on 3 June 1922. Charles was born 25 November 1881 and was ten years older than Wilda (born in Colorado in 1891). He was previously married to Ivy Mae Reed, and had a son together – Walter Reed, who was the same age as Eleanor.

According the census records, Wilda completed 4 years of high school. In 1940, Charles was 59 years old. He was a manager. Together with their children they rented a home in Denver. He had an income of $5,000 USD (value of $90,000 USD today). Charles may have been in the army in WWI. His draft card said that he was slender, tall, had brown grey hair, and dark brown eyes. He was drafted on 6 Sept 1918.

William E. Bacon, according to census records, completed at least one year of college. His occupation was listed as "clerk" and he made $1,200 USD annually. He lived at 2331 Jasmine Street in Denver. Prior to that he lived at 1181 South Vine Street in Denver.

According to his draft card, he was born on January 31, 1918 in Billings Montana.. He lived in Denver and was 22 when he registered for service. We was working for The Texas Company. William Edward Bacon listed Charles M. Reed as his next of kin. William registered on 16 Oct 1940. He was 6' 1 inches tall and 170 lbs. with gray eyes and brown hair. His complexion was listed as "dark", but his race was "white".

Prior census information indicates that he worked as a clerk for Frigidaire prior to The Texas Company.

William registered for the service on 16 October 1940. He was assigned to the 23rd Engineer Battalion, part of the 7th Armored Division. This Battalion was activated on 15 April 1941. William likely went to Camp Beauregard in Louisiana for basic training. The Battalion was made up of 28 officers and 728 enlisted men. They trained in California, Virginia and Indiantown Gap Pennsylvania before sailing to the UK in September, 1943. Upon arrival in the UK, the battalion was stationed at Fonthill Bishop, Wiltshire England and took part in maneuvers over Salisbury Plain, and along the coast. The Engineering battalion was responsible for road and bridge construction, allowing the army to move artillery and troops.

The 7th Armored Division landed on Omaha Beach on August 13 and 14, 1944. They were assigned the US Third Army, commanded by General George Patton. They made their way to the Seigfried Front Line. William presumably helped his build temporary bridges across the

Seine River, using a floating "Bailey" across the river, anchored by four river barges. They completed this project on 23 August. As they made the move east, they met increased resistance from the Germans. After taking Verdun, the Third Army met stiff resistance at the Moselle river by the Seigfried Line in Belgium. By that time troops were exhausted, equipment was badly worn, and supplies were running out. While new offensive reinforcements were authorized by mid-September, William E. Bacon was killed in enemy combat on 17 September 1944. He is laid to rest at the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Hombourg, Belgium.

His division went on to fight the Battle of the Bulge, building bridges, making roads and removed thousands of mines in the process. They constructed four bridges across the Erft River and Canal under intense enemy artillery and mortar fire. In the final, great offense, the bridge company aided an engineering group in the bridging of the Rhine river near Bonn. The last operation was the bridging of the Mulde River, was abandoned by army order at the end of the war. The 23rd is now known as the "Road Builders of the AEF", and was officially inactivated on 10 November, 1945 in Germany. The division suffered 898 killed in action, 3,811 wounded in action and 165 mission in action.

William was 26 when he died. He never married or had children.

Links:

Monuments Link
https://www.abmc.gov/decedent-search/bacon%3Dwilliam

23d Engineer Battalion
https://history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/lineages/branches/eng/0023enbn.htm

Also
https://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=21229

https://aomda.org/fr/node/45306?fbclid=IwAR27V7ZkzPz1l2j476_1rxFuYCB59SzBcI8ETAk0bGCTre7OpP4FS6WPgMM

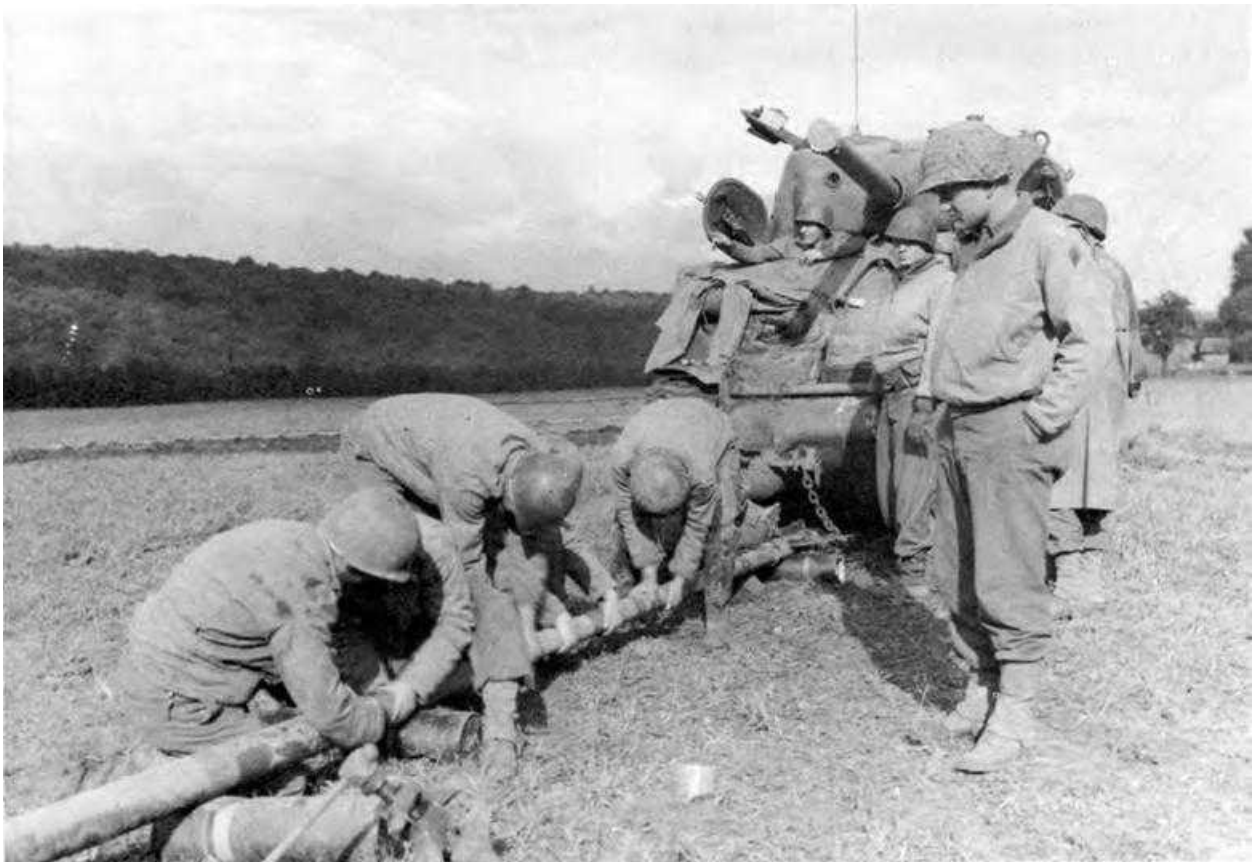
23rd Engineers
http://tothosewhoserved.org/usa/ts/usatse03/chapter17.html

Documentary on Battle of the Bulge
https://www.c-span.org/video/?455128-1/the-battle-st-vith

Over the Seine and Push on
http://ww2today.com/28-august-1944-over-the-seine-and-push-on

Photos:

23rd Division in Belgium



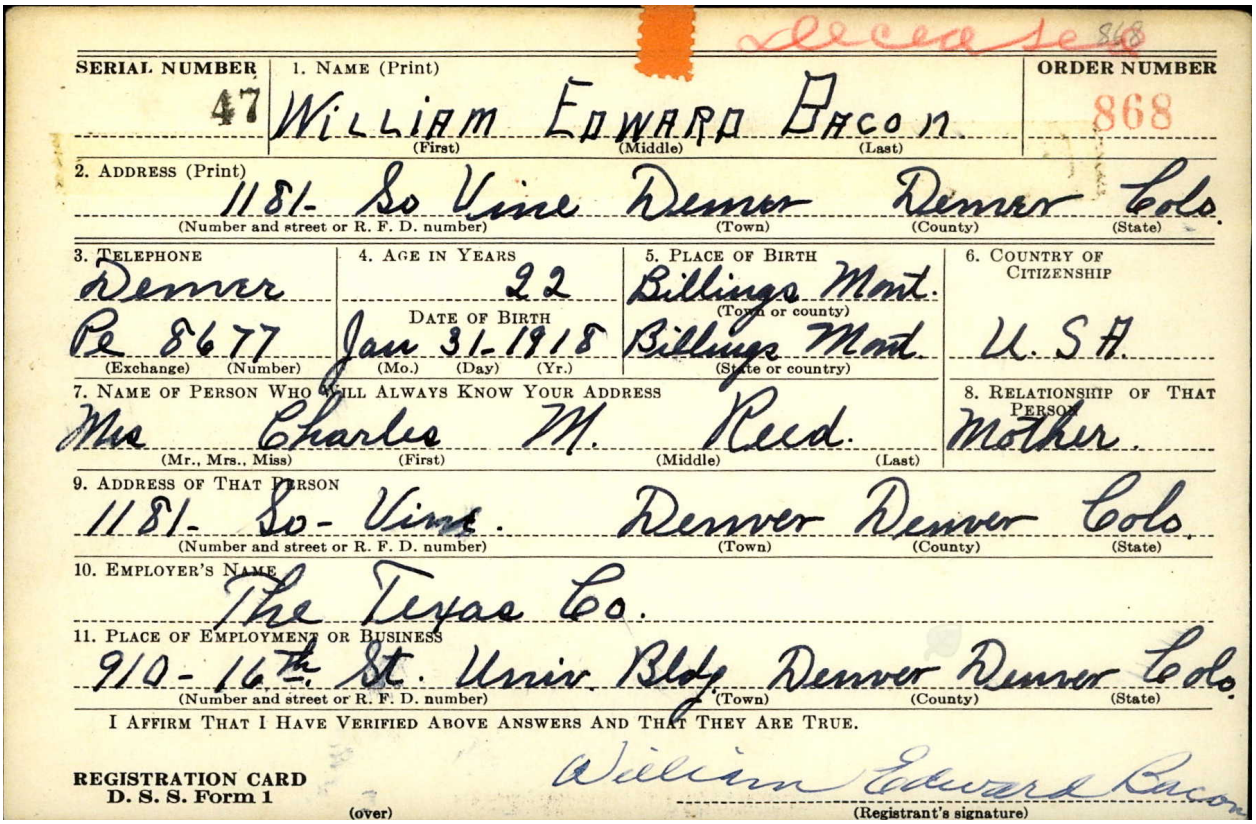
23rd Division in Belgium

Bridge of River Seine, by 23rd Division in Belgium

Bridge constructed over the Seine

Bridge over Seine at Vernon, 28 August 1944. One of these workers could be William.

23rd Division in Belgium



SERIAL NUMBER 47 | 1. NAME (Print) William (First) Edward (Middle) Bacon (Last) | ORDER NUMBER 868

2. ADDRESS (Print) 1181 So Vine (Number and street or R. F. D. number) Denver (Town) Denver (County) Colo. (State)

3. TELEPHONE Denver (Exchange) Re 8677 (Number)

4. AGE IN YEARS 22

DATE OF BIRTH Jan (Mo.) 31 (Day) 1918 (Yr.)

5. PLACE OF BIRTH Billings Mont. (Town or county) Billings Mont. (State or country)

6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.

7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs (Mr., Mrs., Miss) Charles (First) M. (Middle) Reed. (Last)

8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON Mother.

9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 1181 So. Vine. (Number and street or R. F. D. number) Denver (Town) Denver (County) Colo. (State)

10. EMPLOYER'S NAME The Texas Co.

11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 910 - 16th St. Univ. Bldg (Number and street or R. F. D. number) Denver (Town) Denver (County) Colo. (State)

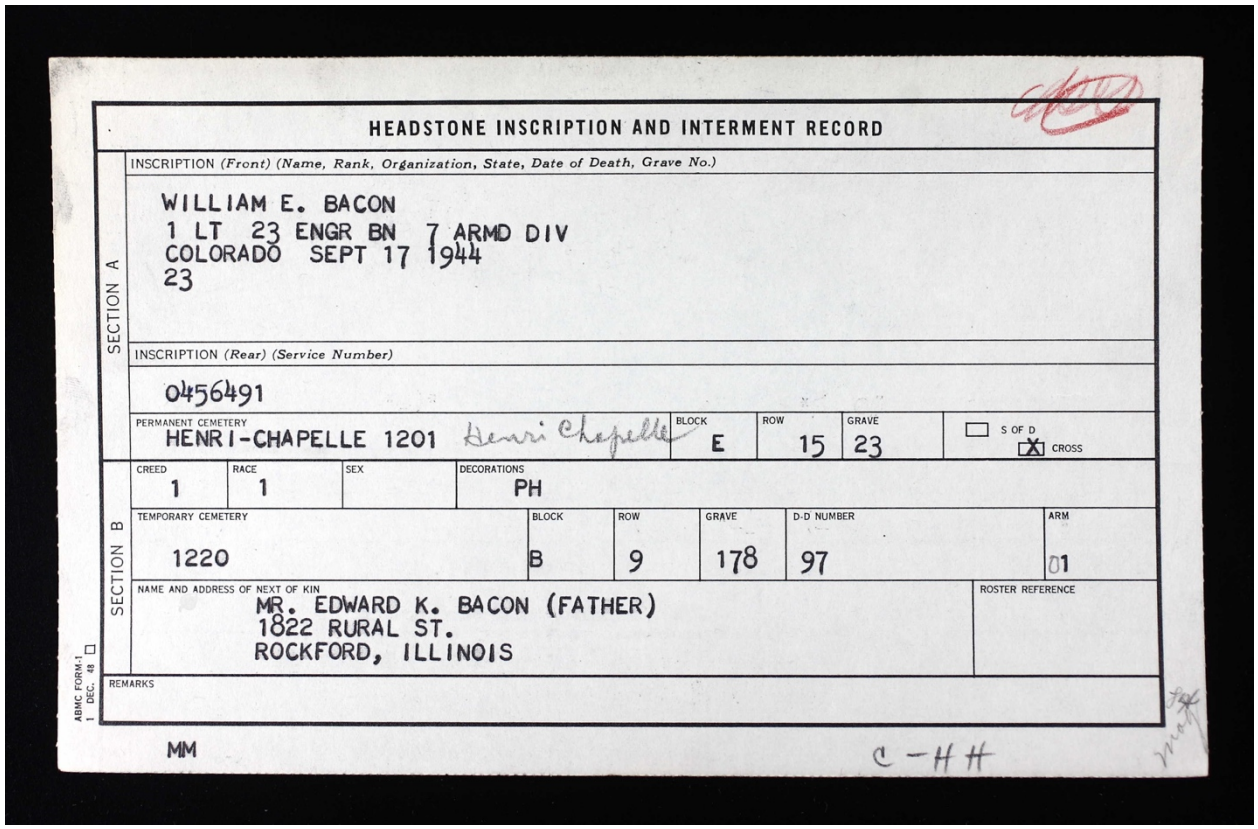
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

William Edward Bacon (Registrant's signature)

REGISTRATION CARD
D. S. S. Form 1

(over)

William E. Bacon's Draft Registration Card



HEADSTONE INSCRIPTION AND INTERMENT RECORD

SECTION A

INSCRIPTION (Front) (Name, Rank, Organization, State, Date of Death, Grave No.)

WILLIAM E. BACON
1 LT 23 ENGR BN 7 ARMD DIV
COLORADO SEPT 17 1944
23

INSCRIPTION (Rear) (Service Number)

0456491

PERMANENT CEMETERY	BLOCK	ROW	GRAVE	S OF D / CROSS
HENRI-CHAPELLE 1201 Henri Chapelle	E	15	23	☐ S OF D ☒ CROSS

SECTION B

CREED	RACE	SEX	DECORATIONS
1	1		PH

TEMPORARY CEMETERY	BLOCK	ROW	GRAVE	D-D NUMBER	ARM
1220	B	9	178	97	01

NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEXT OF KIN
MR. EDWARD K. BACON (FATHER)
1822 RURAL ST.
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

ROSTER REFERENCE

REMARKS

ABMC FORM-1
1 DEC. 48 ☐

MM

C-HH

Internment Record

The Daily Sentinel (Grand Junction, Colorado) · 9 Jan 1945, Tue · Page 8

Montrose, Placerville Soldiers Killed in Action on West Front

Two western Colorado soldiers were on the list of 3,034 men killed in action in the European theatre which was issued today by the war department.

They were 2nd Lt. Herman M. Fresques, son of Edward Fresques, Montrosee, and Pvt. Jose R. Gonzales Jr., son of Jose Gonzales, Placerville.

Others from Colorado on the list:

Pfc. Gilbert Archuleta; father, John Archuleta, Monte Vista. Lt. William E. Bacon; mother, Mrs. Wilda S. Reed, Denver. Tech. 5th Gr. Roy M. Bullock; mother, Mrs. Nellie M. Bailley, Lamar; S-Sgt. Ralph M. Bullock; father, Ralph M. Bullock, Wray. Pfc. Wesley H. Daw; mother, Mrs. Clara B. Daw, Divide. Cpl. William H. Dukeman Jr.; mother, Mrs. Gertrude A. Dukeman, Keeneburg. Pfc. Gabe Duran; mother, Mrs. Mary D. Al-

Narrative (from histories on web sites cited above)

23RD. ARMORED ENGINEER BN

Lt. Colonel Lawrence G. Foster led the 23rd through five European campaigns

The history of the 23rd Armored Engineer Battalion encompasses both world wars. The original regiment was activated at Camp Meade, Maryland, in 1917, and served brilliantly in France. Known as the Road Builders Of The AEF, the first 23rd set a high standard of achievement for its modern namesake. The Battalion was reactivated on April 15, 1941, at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, with the 3rd Armored Division. Cadres were made up of 28 officers and 728 enlisted men from the 17th Engineer Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division. Major Fremont S.Tandy was the first commanding officer. The 23rd trained at Camp Beauregard and Camp Polk Louisiana; at the Desert Training Center, California; Camp Pickett,Virginia; and Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, before sailing for Europe early in September, 1943. Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, the battalion was stationed at Fonthill Bishop, Wiltshire, England, and took part in exten -sive maneuvers over Salisbury Plain, and along the coast. Lt Colonel Lawrence G. Foster led the 23rd Armored Engineer Battalion through all five campaigns in thr west. He and his troops went ashore on Omaha Beach on June 23, 1944. The hedgerows of Normandy presented an immediate problem, Some method had to be devised to get tanks through, or over these formidable embankments. After blasting passages with TNT at bloody Villiers Fossard and Haut Vents, Fosters men invented a double blade hedge cutter which was attached to the divisions Sherman tanks by maintenance crews, These proved highly successful. The battalions first big combat bridging operation was carried out near Corbeil, France, when 540 feet of treadway were thrown across the Seine River. After the Seine, the engineers bridged the Marne, Aisne, and a number of other streams which paved the divisions march into Belgium. At Mons, they exchanged shovels for machine guns and declared a Roman holiday by mowing down disorganized enemy columns trying to break out of encirclement. Two bridges at Namur, one across the Meuse, and one spanning the Sambre Canal, were built under hazardous circumstances. Working under vicious mortar, artillery and sniper fire, men of the 23rd mastered the dragons teeth of the Siegfried Line, lifted thousands of mines, destroyed pillboxes and cleared road blocks. During the Ardennes fighting, units of the battalion aided in successful defense of Hotton, and later took part in fierce battles at Lierneux, Cherain, and Sterpigny. The normally hazardous work of lifting mines was made more difficult by severe cold and snow which prevailed during this period. Back in the Rhineland the engineers constructed four bridges across the Erft River and Canal under observed enemy artillery, mortar and small arms fire. In the final great offensive, the bridge company also aided an engineer group in the bridging of the Rhine near Bonn. The battalions last operation, the bridging of the Mulde River, was abandoned by army order. The 23rd came out of the line with reason to feel that its combat record added much to the proud history of the original Road Builders Of the AEF.

Dave Wolf

Action in France

The 7th Armored Division landed on Omaha and Utah Beaches, 13–14 August 1944, and was assigned to U.S. Third Army, commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton. The division drove through Nogent-le-Rotrou in an attack on Chartres. The city fell on 18 August. From Chartres, the division advanced to liberate Dreux and then Melun, where they crossed the Seine River, 24 August. The division then pushed on to bypass Reims and liberate Château-Thierry and then Verdun, 31 August. The 7th Armored halted briefly for refueling and then on 6 September drove on toward the Moselle and made a crossing near Dornot. This crossing had to be withdrawn in the face of the heavy fortifications around Metz. The 7th Armored then made attempts to cross the Moselle northwest of Metz but the deep river valley was not suitable terrain for an armored attack. Elements of the division assisted the 5th Infantry Division in expanding a bridgehead east of Arnaville, south of Metz, and on 15 September, the main part of the division crossed the Moselle there. The 7th Armored Division was repulsed in its attacks across the Seille River at and near Sillegny, part of an attack in conjunction with the 5th Infantry division that was also repulsed further north.

Support of Operation Market Garden[edit]

On 25 September 1944, the 7th Armored Division was transferred to the U.S. Ninth Army, under Lieutenant General William Hood Simpson, and began the march to the Netherlands where they were needed to protect the right (east) flank of the corridor opened by Operation Market Garden. They were to operate in the southeast Netherlands, so that British and Canadian forces and the 104th Infantry Division could clear the Germans from the Scheldt Estuary in the southwest Netherlands and open the shipping lanes to the critical port of Antwerp, to allow Allied ships to bring supplies from Britain.

On 30 September, the 7th Armored Division launched an attack from the north on the town of Overloon, against significant German defenses. The attacks progressed slowly and finally settled into a series of counter-attacks reminiscent of trench warfare of World War I. On 8 October, the division was relieved from the attack on Overloon by the British 11th Armoured Division and moved south of Overloon to the Deurne–Weert area. Here they were attached to the British Second Army, under Lieutenant General Sir Miles C. Dempsey, and ordered to make demonstration attacks to the east, in order to divert enemy forces from the Overloon and Venlo areas, where British troops pressed the attack. This plan succeeded, and the British were finally able to liberate Overloon.

On 27 October 1944, the main part of the 7th Armored Division was in essentially defensive positions along the line Nederweert (and south) to Meijel to Liesel, with the demonstration force still in the attack across the Deurne canal to the east. The Germans launched a two-division offensive centered on Meijel, catching the thinly stretched 87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron of the 7th Armored Division by

surprise. However, the response by the 7th Armored and by British Lieutenant General Sir Richard O'Connor's British VIII Corps, to which the division was attached, stopped the German attack on the third day and then from 31 October to 8 November gradually drove the enemy out of the terrain that they had taken. During this operation, at midnight on the night of 31 October–1 November Major General Lindsay Silvester, who had led the division since its activation, was relieved[3] as commander of the division and replaced by Major General Robert W. Hasbrouck.

Casualties

- **Total battle casualties:** 5,799[4]
- **Killed in action:** 898[4]
- **Wounded in action:** 3,811[4]
- **Missing in action:** 165[4]
- **Prisoner of war:** 925[4]

The Seine Crossings

At the beginning of the third week in August, even- before the siege of Brest had begun, U.S. Army engineers were helping American divisions to cross the Seine. Bridging operations began on 20 August when the 151st Engineer Combat Battalion put a tread-way over the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt, about thirty miles northwest (as the crow flies) of Paris. By the time they reached the Seine the engineers of both First and Third Armies had become adept at getting the combat troops across rivers. After First Army's breakthrough at Marigny–St. Gilles and Third Army's advance east from Fougères (south of Avranches), bridge construction became the principal engineer mission. Roads across northern France were damaged in few places, and these could be quickly repaired or bypassed. The very speed of the advance prevented the Germans from either preparing extensive road demolitions or planting large minefields. Most bridges, however, were down—demolished either by the Germans or by Allied bombers.25

In supporting the advance of First Army's VII Corps, for example, corps and division engineers built twenty-nine bridges across the Seine between 31 July and 26 August. At several important crossing sites, such as those on the Seine immediately after the breakout and others on the Mayenne and Varenne Rivers during the closing of the Falaise Gap, the ground forces required four bridges at each crossing to provide adequate roadnets. Fortunately, in most cases not all the spans of existing stone bridges were down and most abutments were intact, permitting the rapid emplacement of treadway and Bailey bridging.26

Of particular interest to the engineers was a dual roadway Bailey built over the Varenne on 7 and 8 August at Ambrières-le-Grand (about twenty miles southeast of Mortain), where only one arch of a 120-foot-long stone bridge remained in place. On the remaining pier, Company B of the 297th Engineer Combat Battalion began

constructing a Class 40 Bailey at 0800 and by nightfall had completed it. That afternoon the 23rd Armored Engineer Battalion quickly emplaced a treadway alongside, crossed the tanks of the 3rd Armored Division, and then departed with the treadway. Two-lane traffic was still desired, but the abutments were not wide enough to carry two Bailey bridges side by side. The 297th Battalion converted the Bailey into a dual road structure by adding a second story to the central girder, building and launching a third girder, and then placing transoms and flooring for the second roadway. The two-lane bridge was ready by 2000 on 8 August and proved sturdy enough to support not only a 1st Infantry Division regimental combat team crossing but also a week's continuous supply of traffic.27

Engineers with the convoys rolling eastward found northern France "something different from Normandy: the streets black with people, who seemed to do nothing twenty-four hours a day but stand there and cheer us and wave, and weep, some of them, and throw w flowers and fruits and vegetables, and stare wide-eyed at the trucks and jeeps and tanks. What always got them most were the tank retrievers that filled the whole road, with red lights blinking, and all armored up like something from Mars, and the Long Toms and 8 inch hows. They loved them!"28

While moving up to the XIX Corps' Seine River crossing at Meulan, a few miles northwest of Paris, the 1115th Engineer Combat Group's long, ungainly Brockway bridge trucks, carrying sections of steel treadways and lifting equipment, made a strong impression on the Germans. During the night of 26 August a convoy that included the 295th Engineer Combat Battalion ran into a company of German soldiers. Uncertain of the enemy strength, the convoy held its fire. So did the Germans—a circumstance that mystified the Americans until two American prisoners of war, breaking away from their captors and jumping aboard the American convoy, supplied the reason. The Germans had been afraid to fire because they thought the Brockway truck was a new secret weapon—perhaps a rocket launcher.29
In the race across France the Seine River, not Paris, became the main objective. By mid-August enemy forces were fleeing the Argentan–Falaise pocket and concentrating along the lower Seine northwest of Paris. In the forefront of the pursuit, Third Army's XV Corps was to send its 5th Armored Division down the west bank of the Seine and put its 79th Infantry Division across the river to establish a bridgehead on the east bank near Mantes-Gassicourt.

A few hours before midnight on 19 August, receiving the order to cross, the commander of the 79th sent one regiment on foot across a dam near Mantes. A torrential rain was falling. In the blackness and rain the men walked single file, each man touching the one ahead. Another regiment, plus light equipment, crossed in engineer assault boats and rafts. The crossing seemed interminable—the river was from 500 to 800 feet wide. For the first bridge the 79th Division commander borrowed 700 feet of treadway from the 5th Armored Division. By the afternoon of 20 August the treadway was installed on rubber pontons, and another infantry regiment was crossing in trucks; by nightfall the bulk of the 79th, including tanks, artillery, and tank destroyers,

was across the river. During the day enemy aircraft came over and attacked the treadway; its rubber pontons made the bridge vulnerable to bullets and bomb splinters. Next morning the division engineers began to construct a less vulnerable floating Bailey, supporting it on timber laid across four river barges. Finished at 0130 on 23 August, the improvised Bailey had to be used carefully because loads of more than forty tons caused the sides of the barges to spread apart. Nevertheless, the bridge served the division well.30

While elements of XV Corps, which temporarily passed to First Army control on 24 August, were using the Bailey over the lower Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt, engineers of Third Army's XII and XX Corps were preparing crossings south of Paris on the upper Seine. Typical was the effort by XX Corps engineers to cross the 7th Armored Division at Melun, twenty-five miles southeast of Paris. Hopes that the bridge at Melun could be captured intact were dashed on the morning of 23 August, when the Germans destroyed the span just as Combat Command Reserve (CCR) of the 7th Armored Division was about to attack. Because Combat Command Reserve had no assault boats and was receiving heavy fire from the opposite bank, the division commander brought up Combat Command A to cross downriver from Melun and attack the city from the north. Arriving the same morning at Ponthierry, a village about five miles downstream from Melun, Combat Command A, with the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1139th Engineer Combat Group in support, found the bridge at Ponthierry demolished. Reconnaissance revealed two suitable assault crossing sites near Tilly, a hamlet a mile to the north. After a heavy artillery preparation at 1615, two companies of the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion, using seventy-six assault boats the 509th Engineer Light Ponton Company supplied, began crossing the armored troops at both sites. Initial waves went across without casualties, but succeeding waves met rifle fire that killed two of the engineers. The engineer battalion suffered even more heavily later in the evening when a German artillery shell hit one of its trucks, killing five men.

Meantime, elements of the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion had started construction of a treadway bridge at the northernmost site, aided by elements of the 7th Armored Division's organic 33rd Armored Engineer Battalion. (During the fast pursuit the troops of the 33rd had been riding on the outside of tanks acting as riflemen and had undertaken little engineer work.) By midnight the bridge was ready. Bulldozer operators, who prepared the approaches to the bridge as well as landing slips for a ferry operated at the south site, accomplished a particularly hazardous task under mortar, artillery, and rifle fire.

Engineers of V Corps had the enviable mission of assisting in the liberation of Paris. On 24 August reconnaissance parties of the 4th Engineer Combat Battalion, organic to the 4th Infantry Division,which with the 2nd French Armored Division formed the bulk of V Corps, went forward to contact the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) and obtain data on Seine crossings. On the twenty-sixth, the combat engineers built a treadway bridge south of Paris and on that day and the next worked on the streets of Paris, clearing

roadblocks and removing mines and booby traps. But the engineers had only two days to enjoy the riotous welcome given the liberators before the 4th Battalion moved east of Paris with its division. For the victory parade of the 28th Infantry Division down the Champs-Elysees on 29 August, engineers of V Corps' 1171st Engineer Combat Group improvised a reviewing stand for senior American and French officers, using. a Bailey bridge turned upside down.31

Beyond the Seine

After crossing the Seine, First Army's XIX, V, and VII Corps turned north and northeast in rapid pursuit of the fleeing and disorganized enemy. Fastest of all—"pursuit With a capital 'P' "—was the headlong 100-mile dash of XIX Corps to the Belgian border at Tournai on 1 and 2 September.32 Crossing the Somme on bridges the British had captured intact with FFI help, the corps encountered no major water obstacles until it reached the Albert Canal and the Meuse River during the second week in September. In the "rather strange war" that developed, large pockets of the enemy were bypassed and Germans wandered into American bivouac areas. Two engineer task forces organized from elements of the 1104th Engineer Combat Group had the mission of rapidly clearing and maintaining roads and constructing the few bridges required.33 In the center of the First Army advance, the engineers of V Corps, supporting the 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions and the U.S. 5th Armored and 2nd French Armored Divisions, constructed a series of floating and fixed bridges over the Aisne and the Oise and various small canals to the north of those rivers. Near Cambrai, south of the Belgian border, the corps (less the 2nd French Armored Division) on 4 September turned to the right toward Luxembourg. During its march east, the corps encountered its first formidable water obstacle—the Meuse. The retreating Germans had destroyed all bridges along the line of advance-from Charleville to Sedan. At Charleville on 6 September the 1171st Engineer Combat Group erected V Corps' first heavy ponton bridge, followed two days later by a second at Sedan. Because of the limited availability of floating equipment and of the need to keep treadway equipment with the forward elements, corps engineers rebuilt damaged bridges, including railway bridges, whenever possible. During these operations French civilians and members of the French Forces of the Interior provided helpful information concerning the status of bridges and the location of minefields.34

In the course of VII Corps' rapid march northeast from the Seine the first important water barrier was the Marne, but it presented few problems to the corps engineers. The 3rd Armored Division captured intact bridges at La Ferte and Chateau-Thierry, and one at Meaux, only partially destroyed, was quickly repaired. Elements of the 1120th and 1106th Engineer Combat Groups were over the border into Belgium before the end of the first week in September and made their most noteworthy contribution in bridging the Meuse in Belgium at Namur, Liege, and Dinant.

On the night of 6 September, the 1106th Group's 238th Engineer Combat Battalion constructed a record 564-foot treadway at Namur in five hours.35 The next day the

battalion spanned the Meuse with a 150-foot triple-double Bailey. Several shorter Baileys and treadways also had to be erected in the same neighborhood. The work went on under the protection of a corps antiaircraft battery; nevertheless, the battalion suffered two casualties. Beginning on 9 September the group's 237th Engineer Combat Battalion constructed a 550-foot treadway downriver at Liege and repaired a partially demolished bridge with Bailey equipment. Enemy bombing at the sites cost the battalion casualties consisting of three men killed and a number wounded. The most important effort of the 1120th Group took place upriver at Dinant, where the 297th Engineer Combat Battalion spent more than twelve hours on 9 and 10 September constructing a 287-foot, Class 40 floating Bailey, working most of the time in heavy fog.36

During Third Army's rapid dash to the Moselle from the Seine, where General Patton relinquished the Melun bridgehead to First Army, the principal water barriers were the Marne and the Meuse. On 28 August tanks of the 4th Armored Division, spearheading the advance of XII Corps, found the main bridge at Chalons-sur-Marne blown. The debris blocking the river formed a temporary dam, enabling the engineers of the 24th Armored Engineer Battalion to construct a hasty ford by which the entire task force crossed in 1 l/2 hours. As the water rose, the engineers constructed a treadway trestle bridge, and on the following day the 248th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1117th Engineer Combat Group camped a few miles upstream at Vitry-le-Francois. By 31 August the 4th Armored Division was crossing the Meuse at Commercy over bridges seized intact. To the north the 1139th Engineer Combat Group, supporting the advance of XX Corps, found, on 29 August, two undamaged, permanent wooden bridges of unlimited capacity at Chateau-Thierry on the Marne. Treadways at other points were all completed the same day. At Verdun, where the main highway bridge crossed the Meuse, the Germans had installed mines, but the FFI was able to prevent demolition. On 31 August, XX Corps was over the Meuse in strength.37

Toward the end of August ominous entries had begun to appear in the journals of the engineer combat groups of First and Third Armies. Gasoline was running short, as were certain items of bridge-building equipment. The armies had outrun their supply depots, which were far to the rear, most of them at the original invasion beaches. The problem was mainly one of transportation. The damage to railway lines and bridges had been extensive, principally as a result of Allied bombing. The installation of pipelines for petroleum, oil, and lubricants, an engineer responsibility, could not keep pace with the headlong advance of the combat forces, and trucks became the only means of getting supplies forward.38 A particularly troublesome problem for the combat engineers was map supply—either because maps could not be sent forward in time to be of use or because the combat forces were moving into areas for which no maps were available. Leading elements of the 4th Armored Division, which during August traveled more than a thousand miles in less than thirty days, normally operated with road maps obtained from the FFI or captured German stocks. One of the first tasks of the engineers entering Verdun was to scour the city for German maps.39

For both U.S. armies, the pursuit ended the second week in September when Third Army met stiffening German resistance at the Moselle and First Army slowed down at the Siegfried Line in Belgium. By that time troops were exhausted, equipment was badly worn, and disturbing shortages in critical supplies had begun to appear. New offensives by both armies were authorized in mid-September, but it soon became apparent that stronger Communications Zone support was imperative.40