

## Rhine Crossing

Part Two

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**W**e were given fifty-seven hours to complete the roads and bridges and they were serious as both the American Ninth Army and the British Second were to cross at the appointed hour. Their advance would hold up until that day giving both armies time to bring up the supplies we would need to finish the war. There was very little rest for anyone...if you slept it was where you dropped and you'd better not be in the way. Eating was on the run and nothing to brag about. There were no cook tents on that hillside, only aid stations.

To me a magnificent part of the war was the movement of supplies, as they were needed.



Every time I looked up the hill the mountain of boxes was higher and longer. The Germans would have delayed the inevitable if they had concentrated on them instead of us down on the water. It seemed there were thousands of barrels of gasoline for the tanks that were beginning to arrive and park in orderly fashion. And there were thousands of soldiers preparing for the rush across the bridges. We were building three kinds, one for troops, one for trucks and other vehicles, and a third for the Sherman tanks that weighed sixty tons each. And the British had brought up much larger artillery, shells so big we could watch them leave the gun barrels and fly over our heads. We told them about an 88-gun flash we could

see; the third round the Brits fired made that gun and the building it was hidden in disappear. We promised them tea and crumpets.

The big day arrived at first light and out of nowhere they came. We could hear the noise before we saw them coming down our roads. Ground military of every description, streams of vehicles and endless American and British soldiers waving and saluting the job we had done; we were damn proud and exhausted. Of course the movement of all this traffic kept us working to keep the road and bridge entrances passable. Tanks tear up the land like you won't believe and we suspected some of the cute little turns were done in humor to keep us alert. These troops had come from rest areas, waiting on us, as powerful as they were we were boss until the last steel pin had been driven home and bridge decking fastened down. Our planes bombed and strafed the far side clearing the way.

We knew that in a few days, we could relax before catching up to the armies now moving fast east of us. They would fan out across many miles and encounter other canals and rivers that needed a bridge. They would again be looking for us. We had plenty to do...now P38 fighter planes would be looking for a place to land and gas up. That, too,

was our job, and making territory mine free for more field hospitals and supply dumps. There is no monotony for Combat Engineers, except for bad weather, wet clothes, cold food, and never knowing where the hell you are. The mail had a terrible time finding us.

The end was in sight even though there would still be a month of heavy fighting. As our armies progressed we were handed more and more prisoners to pen up in barbed wire cages. They had had enough and just wanted to escape the Russians...we obliged them but could not feed them. Guarding the cages was for MPs and we moved on. We did have to deal somewhat with concentration camps but you've already heard enough about them. May 8, 1945 was just a few days away on the calendar; we would survive until then. But only fifty one percent of our original battalion was still with us. So we were told.