

20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II

The Wavy Arrow

November 1, 2002

Virginia Beach Reunion A Success

The 55th annual reunion of the 20th Combat Engineers Association of World War II was held at the Howard Johnson Hotel in Virginia Beach, Virginia, October 3-6- 2002, attended by 16 veterans and a total of 47 attendees. They included:

George J. Allen (HQ, 1171 Group) with Ann B. Allen
Jessie C. Britt (Honorary Member)
Henry Roscoe Flowers (Company B, 20th) with
Gloria Flowers Norris and Raquel Johnson
George Griffenhagen (Company B, 1340th) with Joan Griffenhagen,
Edna Griffenhagen, and Mark Waller
Charles F. Hurley (Company A, 20th) with Pat Smith
Francis P. Knorr (Company A, 20th) with Mr. and Mrs Jerry A. Ries,
and Mr. and Mrs. James V. Babilon
Bernard P. McDonnell (Officer, 20th)
Neysa Miller (Honorary Member)
Nannie K. Morrow (Honorary Member) with Richard Morrow
Harry E. Moulder (644Topo1171 Group) with Betty Moulder
Joseph K. Noon (Company B, 20th) with Edith Noon,
Gregory and Claudia Noon, and Kevin Noon
Steve Poulos (Company B, 20th) with Ivy G. Taebel
Douglas Pulliam (Company C, 1340th) with Pat Pulliam
Willie Carl Scott (Company A, 20th) with Willyne Scott
Ben C. Scronce (Company A, 20th) with Jean Scronce, and
Benny and Keko Hoover
Truman H. Setliffe (Commander, 1340th)
George N. Spivey (Company A, 20th) with Juanita Spivey
William L. Waldrep (Company A, 20th) with Jim and Libby Waldrep
Emanuel J. Wasinger (Company A, 1340th) with Lucille Griele
and Anna Marie Iven

We want to express special appreciation to the following for having contributed a total of 15 door prizes: Jessie Britt; Charles F. Hurley, Francis Knorr, Clarence O. Magee, Neysa Miller, Betty Moulder, Mrs. Rupert Morrow, Truman H. Setliffe, and Walter and Doris Wolczanski. Betty Moulder also provided handmade center-piece table decorations and Doris Wolczanski provided unique "happy face" lapel pins for everyone attending the dinner. \$150 was collected for 50/50 tickets, so \$75.00 was won by Henry Roscoe Flowers. The following veterans had registered for the Reunion, but had to cancel their attendance because of illness: Charles Blankenship (Company B, 20th) with Genivieve, Henry Linton Smith (Officer), and Walter Wolczanski (Company B, 20th) with Doris.

Deceased Veterans

Woodrow Wilson Conley (B/20) died September 5, 2002, age 84, at his home in Port St. Lucie, Florida. He was born in Reno, Virginia, August 23, 1918, and served as a construction engineer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Bethesda, Maryland, for 38 years before retiring to Florida.

Eston Mandley Parrish (A/20) died September 4, 2002, age 83, at his home in Benson, North Carolina. Funeral Services were held at Rose & Graham Funeral Home Chapel on September 7, His widow, Vida Mae Dupree Parrish will continue to receive the *Wavy Arrow* as an Honorary Member.

News and Notes

Neysa Miller (widow of Federick R. Miller, former association secretary who died in 1999) was omitted from the last roster for which we apologize. She still lives at 33 Dawley Road, Westminister, MA 01473, and her telephone number of 978-874-5606. Neysa has turned over to your secretary the archival records of the 20th Combat Engineers Association of WWII including the minutes from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, which now rests in the hands of your secretary-treasurer. Thank you, Neysa. We will use these records in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to remind members of some of the more interesting activities of your association over the past thirty years.

Cheryl Ellefson (daughter of John Horton, C/20) writes "I have great memories on the Reunions going back to 1965. I regret not being able to attend the 2002 Reunion in Virginia Beach, but look forward to reading about it in the *Wavy Arrow*."

James D. Orban (Officer) hopes that all went well for the Virginia Beach reunion. "Please say Hi to all who admit knowing me. Keep those *Wavy Arrows* coming."

Robert J. Pearson (B/20) has a new mailing address. It is 143 Mary Street, Syracuse, NY 13208. His new telephone number is 315-422-9129.

Charles J. Riser (D/20; A/1340) reports that Elsie Thornhill died January 4, 2000. She was the wife of Marcus Thornhill of the 1340th headquarters medical detachment.

William A. Thomas (H&S/20) is disappointed that he was unable to attend the Reunion. "I just can't get far away from home anymore."

Contributions

Even though we are no longer collecting annual membership dues, we welcome contributions from our members that permit us to publish and send the *Wavy Arrow*. We thank the following for having made a contribution during the past several months.

Cheryl Ellefson (daughter of John Horton, C/20) \$15.00

Harry E. Moulder (644Topo1171 Gp) \$10.00

Bernard P. McDonnell taped the following account during the Virginia Beach Reunion describing his personal experiences as Regimental Adjutant of the 20th Engineer Regiment.

Colonel Eugene M. Caffey commanded the 20th Combat Engineers Regiment from September 1941, until May 25, 1943, when he left the regiment to take command of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade. His place was taken by a young West Pointer, Colonel Richard Arnold, who has been serving on General Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff in London.

One week prior to Colonel Arnold's arrival to take command of the 20th that was then located just outside Bizerte, Tunisia, a special courier from the 3rd Infantry Division delivered a letter addressed to Colonel Arnold with a notation reading "Please deliver by most expeditious means," signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower. When the Colonel arrived, he got a big kick out of our extreme concern, and explained that the letter was from his fiance, Kay Summersby, who was Eisenhower's driver.

Colonel Arnold immediately endeared himself to the 20th for his concern over the welfare of our troops and his willingness to learn from the veterans of the Regiment. He was not above prowling through Arab shacks with a mine detail and getting himself covered with fleas. On June 6, 1943, despite efforts by the staff to dissuade him, he met his untimely death as he was being briefed at the site of a partially cleared mine field.

In remembrance of his short time with us, it was decided to build a wooden casket for the Colonel instead of using the customary mattress cover for the burial. I gave the job to "Butterbean Walker," and told him to be sure it would be big enough. When we tried to place it into the grave, the casket was about one foot bigger than the hole that had been dug. I'm sure that Colonel Arnold would have seen the humor in this.

About five days later, I received a very nasty telephone call from the chief-of-staff to 3rd Infantry Division General Truscott. He blasted me for not having promptly made a verbal report on Arnold's death as well as a routine written report submitted through appropriate channels. He told me that General Truscott had just been on the telephone with General Beattle Smith, and that Eisenhower had heard a rumor that Dick Arnold has been killed. Ike wanted an immediate confirmation.

I was ordered to instantly come over to the 3rd Division headquarters to meet with General Truscott. It was not a happy meeting. I had been chewed out many times before but never one to equal this. After things settled down, General Truscott telephoned Beattle Smith and gave him all the details I had described.

A few days later, I had another telephone call from Truscott's chief-of-staff, and to my amazement he was very polite, friendly, and called me "Captain Mac," a far cry from the terms he had previously used. I then learned that Colonel Arnold was engaged to marry Kay Summersby. However, Arnold still had a wife who was his legal next of kin. Divorce proceedings were underway, but they had not been legally finalized. This meant that all of Colonel Arnold's personal effects that had already been packed by Chaplain Carpenter had to be delivered to his legal spouse in the States.

The problem was that many of the contents were gifts, portraits, and love letters from Kay Summersby. Once sealed, it was legally impossible for anyone to open them except for the next of kin. Eisenhower had sent a letter to Truscott that read something like this: "The undersigned feels that it would be in the best interest of the service and others involved in this situation if the personal effects of Colonel Richard Arnold could be examined by the bearer, and any item not deemed appropriate could be removed before sending them to his spouse in the States." Signed Dwight D. Eisenhower.

However, nobody, including Ike, had the legal authority to order this to be done. So I was delegated to get this done, armed with Ike's letter that was to be used only as a last resort. I was transported to the location where the boxes were stored for shipment, but initially I had no success. Finally, I convinced a hard-nosed sergeant to get me five minutes with his commanding officer, after threatening him that things would go bad for him if he didn't cooperate. I then showed Ike's letter to the commanding officer who immediately set a plan in motion. He ordered the area cleared, and we both opened the box, made the necessary withdrawals, and returned them to the 3rd Division headquarters. After Colonel Arnold's funeral, these items were ordered to be sent to Kay Summersby.

What was Kay Summerby's reaction when she learned of Colonel Arnold's death? There are several versions. In her 1972 autobiography, ghost written by Barbara Wyden, Kay Summersby describes the day that Eisenhower told her "Dick has been killed," and recalls that she "was in a state of shock, and Ike comforted her through her grief." The motion picture on Eisenhower's life during World War II provides a different version. It records that Summersby violently reacted to the news and accused Ike of transferring Arnold into combat to get rid of him. After World War II, General George Marshall testified before Congress that Dick Arnold was transferred to "the 20th Engineer Regiment, the top engineer unit in the European Theater," to get a one year command assignment that was necessary for Arnold's ultimate promotion to the rank of General. Which of these explanations is most accurate? It remains a puzzle that probably never will be solved.

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Coming in the next issue of the *Wavy Arrow*, recollections of 1340th commander Truman H. Settlife on Colonel Caffey, and the truth about the Huertgen Forest.

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The 20th Combat Engineer Association of World War II has a new Website.
<http://www.geocities.com/dodimae2001/20thCombatEngineerofWWII.html>

Send items for inclusion in future issues of the *Wavy Arrow* to editor George Griffenhagen, 2501 Drexel Street, Vienna, VA 22180.