

VI Corps Questions for my Book

Some of you have recently asked me what I am interested in as far as material for the book I am writing about **YOU**. Well a very simple answer would be **EVERYTHING!** And that would be the plain and simple truth. Ha-ha! However I know that many of you need more guidelines, so if you haven't already submitted your story to me (many of you have stories on our site), and would like to contribute, then I hope the following questions will kick the process in gear.

Please feel free to expand on these questions, or if a question stirs up a related memory, don't hesitate by any means to write it down. I am serious when I say that I am interested in anything that you can share, whether a few sentences or several pages, whether it is funny, sad, grueling, inspiring, silly, heartbreaking, etc. It can be memories regarding chow, hygiene, local inhabitants, your best friend in the service, the weather, your commanders, building Bailey Bridges, repairing roads, and deactivating mine fields...

I am looking for things that will make the book **REAL**. People like to pick up books and read quotes from the men. Many don't care about the generals or maps 200 miles behind the lines. They want to read about you. What was every day life like? What were your fears, your hopes, and your dreams? Why did you join? What was your worst memory? Your best memory?

I hope that those of who haven't shared their memoirs will take a few moments to do so now. Because I am in the process of writing, it is imperative that I get as much info as I can within the next couple of months, because it's important to hear from YOU, the guys who were actually there. While I can fill in the history from the documents that I have from the National Archives and the Army Corps of Engineers, they are only hard facts and don't tell the whole story.

While I can't give you a definitive date on when the book will be finished, I am making headway, and with your help would like to present you with some kind of rough draft by this time next year, but can only do it with your help.

The first book will be like a coffee-table book with plenty of photos, maps, and your memories. I have decided that I shall write subsequent books that will cover each unit separately and give a comprehensive history of each. The reason I am proceeding like this is to get a book out there as soon as possible. As many of you say, time is of the essence, and I want to make sure that as many of you as possible will be able to read it.

Please don't worry about grammar or spelling or your writing or typing skills. I can deal with that later. Just write from the heart and it will all come out in the end. Answer **all** or **some** of the questions. Remember it's just a guideline to jog your memory.

Thanks so much for your assistance. It's called Army teamwork! Remember I DO have my father's engineer genes. Ha-ha!

Essayons,
Marion

Note: You may want to look over all the questions first, as some may pertain to you or your unit, or not at all.

Questions for the 36th, 39th, 540th Engineers and 1108th

1. What do you remember about Pearl Harbor Day? How did it affect you?
2. Did you enlist or were you drafted? What rank did you start off with, what rank did you end with? Please give your unit details, from regiment down to platoon/squad.
3. The book will start off with a chapter on training, what memories do you have of this time period? Many guys took tests to determine what branch of the service they went into. Did you take a test? Did any of you attend OCS? How did your specialties/talents in civilian life contribute to your role as an engineer? What camps did you go to?
4. When did you ship out and where did you wind up? The 36th, 39th and 540th were in from the very beginning in North Africa. If you took part in the Invasion of North Africa, what were your specific memories? The landing? Your shore duties? Memories of the people, the land, the customs? The Germans, the Italian troops? What other units do you remember from North Africa?
5. If you participated in the Sicilian Campaign, do you remember the training? If so, what do you remember? How much did you know about what lie ahead? Some of you landed at Gela, some at Licata, what do you remember about the initial assault of the island?
6. Several of you told me that you got to meet General George Patton in Sicily, if you did, what you remember about ol' George. A few have stated that you really liked him. Others thought he was a pompous ass. One man said that meeting him was very inspiring and that he really got your spirits up regarding the push on Messina, what are your thoughts?
7. What were your specific duties in Sicily? Many of you also fought as infantry there, if so, please elaborate for me. Again, what other units do you remember from this time period?

8. Next came the Invasion of mainland Italy, do you remember any training involved late summer of 43? What are your memories about the invasion fleet and the first time you stepped on shore? What did you encounter as far as resistance? What were your duties during the Naples/Salerno time frame? Once again, if you also fought as infantry, what are your memories and how did the mainland differ from your past experiences? For everyone, how did the Axis troops differ from those encountered in Sicily?
9. The 540th were responsible for the restoration of the harbor in Naples, if you took part in this, what do you remember and what were your duties. The harbor was restored in an amazing amount of time, how was this accomplished?
10. Were you involved in the Anzio landings? If so, what were your memories of the initial assault on the beachhead, and then later when fiercer forces were encountered? What do you remember most about Anzio? The shelling was hell and constant, what can you tell me about your private experiences on the beachhead? The invasion took place in January, so the winter was well upon you, what was the weather like and how did it affect your unit's goals, duties, fighting effectiveness, etc.? Going out in daylight was suicidal, how did having to hide-out most of the time in daylight affect your moral and the moral of your buddies? VI Corps had to take their HQ underground at this time, what do you remember the foxholes, the Mussolini Canals, etc.? Many patrols only went out at night, what can you tell me about these patrols?
11. If your unit fought in and around Cassino during this period, what sticks out in your head about the winter and spring of 1944? Both Anzio and the southern push through Cassino were nightmares, what were your harshest memories? What were your goals as a unit during this time frame? Constructing bridges and working under these conditions were far from easy. Many times men had to build and reconstruct roads and bridges under the cover of dark, what do you remember about this?
12. The breakthrough finally occurred in late May as the forces from the south met up with the forces on the Anzio Beachhead, what were your memories of this time period? Once the forces were united, did your unit go into Rome or bypass it? If you entered Rome, what were your memories of the Eternal City?
13. Before the training began for the Invasion of Southern France, many of the units went to towns such as Civitavecchia and Piombino. Many took part in the restorations of these port cities, what were your memories of the summer of 1944? What were your duties during this time period?

14. Next southern France... Do you recall the training for this period? I know the 540th and the 48th trained together. If you were a member of either of these units, what do you recall about that specific training exercise? The seas were kind in mid August, what do your recall of the voyage and the first time you laid eyes on the coast of France?
15. While some groups experienced little or no resistance, this was not true for all, what did you experience on the beachhead, and where did your unit land? Many recall an LST being hit and completely blown up in the sea; do you remember this or other similar experiences? Some companies encountered mine fields the first few days on shore, what were your company's experiences? Once the beachhead was secured, what route did you take and what were your orders for the months of August and September? Were your encounters of the French different from those with the Italians? What do you remember about the French countryside?
16. The trek through France was a long one, what were your specific duties in October, November and early December before the "Bulge"? What kind of terrain did you encounter as your unit moved through eastern France and pushed northward? What was enemy resistance like in this part of the country? Did you assist in the building of bridges, roads, the deactivation of minefields, the building of evac hospitals, the reconstruction of railroads, etc.?
17. Many thought the war would be over by Christmas of 1944, what were your thoughts on this? When the Germans counterattacked in mid December, where was your unit and what did your first encounter? Many units prepared or stiffened defenses in their areas, did you take part in this?
18. As the Battle of the Bulge (or as the Ardennes/Alsace Campaign) kicked into high gear, what did your unit experience? Many of the engineering units acted as infantry during this famous campaign, if you acted as infantry, what role did you play? What did you experience? Was your unit expected to hold its ground, or were your pushed back to another defensive line? What other units do you remember from this time?
19. The winter of 1944-45 was one of the worst on record, what do you remember about that winter? Many of the troops even if they weren't in the heat of battle, nonetheless succumbed to weather related injuries. A lot of the men did not have proper winter clothing, and resorted to tearing up sheets or anything else they could procure. They would use these to wrap their feet and hands to keep them from freezing. Some also stuffed newspaper into their jackets and pants, what did you wear and what did you resort to, to keep warm?

20. Ammo and other supplies were also in short supply during the Ardennes/Alsace Campaign; did these shortages affect your company?
21. Even though fighting was fierce and the weather conditions just as bad, the engineers were always expected to do their jobs, such as keeping the roads free from snow and ice to keep the troops moving. What assignments did you have during the German counteroffensive and into January? Many of the men were sent to fortify the Hagenau and Vosges Defensive lines; did you take part in this?
22. As the allies gained headway and winter began to wane, what route did your unit take preceding the Rhine River crossing? Units began to train for crossing and many underwent advance infantry training; what were your memories from February and March 1945? The Germans were losing ground, and some say many of the Axis units were feeling demoralized, however some argue that since they were being pushed back to the Rhine and now defending their homeland that made them fight that much harder. What are your feelings about this and what kind of resistance pockets were you coming across?
23. The Rhine River Crossing! A very interesting and difficult time period, especially for engineer units. What kind of training did you experience and did it prepare you for the REAL thing? A lot of men including engineers lost their lives or were injured during the crossing in March, what did you and your unit encounter? You guys prepared the way so infantry, armor could make the crossing; what divisional units were in your area? Where did you cross? Did you ferry across or were you building bridges? The river was swift, wide, deep and cold; what were your recollections of the crossing? Once across the river, what did you experience?
24. Germany – the Heartland! With approximately eight more weeks of fighting, what cities and towns did your unit enter, and what were your initial feelings about being right in Germany? What kind of resistance did you encounter at this point of the war, and what did you think about any Germans civilians you came across? I hear the German countryside and towns (the ones that weren't bombed to hell) were very beautiful and impressive; what were your impressions? Did things begin to wind down, giving you more time to maybe enjoy some sights or drink German beer, or were things the same old, same old? Hitler at this point had ordered to leave nothing intact for the Allies, forcing many of his troops to burn and destroy everything in your wake (even though many did disobey this direct order); did you experience any of this?
25. Even though the war was coming to a close, many engineering units were busier than ever with clean-up, reconstructing bridges, roads, hospitals

and railroads; what were your duties during the final weeks of war?

26. Where were you when the war came to an official end? What do you recall about this day and what was your initial reaction? Did you have time to celebrate and if so, what did you do to celebrate this joyous occasion?
27. During the occupation of Germany, some units stayed in Germany while others went into Austria, where did you go? Many of the men were more than anxious to get home at this point, especially those who had been in the fighting since North Africa; did you have enough points to go home at this time? How many points did each of you have after the cessation of hostilities in Europe? Did you get to go home right away? If so when did you leave?
28. If you had to stay in Germany or Austria for the duration, how long did you stay until you were shipped home? What were your assignments during this entire period? What did you do for recreation? What are some of your fondest memories? Your most humorous, etc.? Even though the men were strongly encouraged not to fraternize with the populace, we know this rule was broken many times over; what were your experiences with the locals? What kind of booze and food were available to the guys? Men will be men and boys will be boys, what kinds of disciplinary problems occurred in your units?
29. What do remember about your trip home? What kind of emotions ran through your head on the way home and once you got home? How long did it take you to get home, once you were back home in the good ol' US of A? Did you have problems adjusting to civilian life once you returned? If so, what did you experience and what kind of difficulties did you encounter? Did you have nightmares and do you still have nightmares about the war? How did you wartime experiences affect the rest of your life?
30. This section pertains to a certain group of men. After the fall of Rome as the Invasion of Southern France was being planned, the 1108th Engineer Combat Group which consisted of the 48th and 235th Bns, split for good and the 48th left for France along with the 36th and 540th Engineer Regiments. Also staying behind were the 39th Engineer Combat Regiment. If you were part of the 39th or 235th, please describe your journey into northern Italy, from August 15th, 1944 to the end of the war. Many refer to this area and time period in Italy, as the Forgotten Front. Therefore I want to make sure that enough credit and recognition is given to the troops who persevered the harsh climate and terrain. What cities and towns did you go through? The Germans had set up a second line of tough resistance known as the Gustav Line, what kind of fighting did you experience and how did it compare to what you experienced in Southern

- Italy? It is often said that the fighting in Italy was extended due to the actions of General Mark Clark and his decision to enter Rome, allowing the Germans enough time to pull back, regroup and re-organize. What are your feelings about this statement?
31. As with any fighting at the front, getting help and evacuating the wounded was always difficult, but northern Italy posed extra problems with its mountainous terrain; what kind of problems did you experience with this?
32. People always talk about the horrific conditions during the winter of 44-45. Most always talk about the "Bulge", but conditions in Italy were no better. Please elaborate about what you experienced? December and January found the men in France and Belgium low on supplies, ammo and appropriate clothing; was the situation in northern Italy much the same?
33. Fighting and engineering in Italy is usually associated with mud, mud, mud; how did this affect your performance as an engineer and how were the obstacles dealing with the Italian weather and terrain overcome? What were some of your most difficult engineering feats?
34. Same question posed to you as to the men in Germany at the end of the war; what were your feelings and where were you when the war came to a halt in May of 1945? Did you celebrate and if so, how? Did you have enough points to go home right away? If not how many did you have and how long did you have to stay? If you stayed, what were your duties, and where did they take you? What was Italy like after the war; the food, the people, the beer and booze, etc.? What did you do for recreation?
35. Please see question 29!

The questions above pose specific questions, but from here out, feel free to share other memories that you feel comfortable divulging. While the questions above cover a good deal of the war, they are by no means comprehensive, but I hoped they helped to jog some memories. Don't be shy about discussing anything that comes to mind. This may cover things such as morale, drinking, sex, going AWOL, leave, hygiene, lack of sleep, rations, letters and packages from home, propaganda, music, etc.

Were you injured or taken ill during the war? If so, what happened?

What medals/ribbons/pins were you awarded?

What kind of weapons did you normally carry? What kind of weapons were you trained to use? What other kinds of provisions did you normally carry on a daily

basis?

Were you a part of Headquarters, Headquarters and Service (motor pool), or a medic, etc.? If so please give me as much detail about your company and your duties/functions. While I and many others know much about regular companies and their breakdown into smaller units, what were the functions of the other companies? My father was in H&S Co and was part of the motor pool, so if you were too, any details you can give me are greatly appreciated!

Many of you described what is what like to build such bridges as the famous Bailey. Many have told me in person, having it in writing would be priceless!

Many of the men have shared the scenarios that range from down-right hilarious, such as setting up a race-track at Anzio, to coming "this-close" to getting their heads blown off. Some came away with a new faith in God, while others lost their faith, but either way it changed them forever. Some events were born out of boredom; some are classics such as the ones you read in Humor in Uniform section in the Reader's Digest. Whatever they may be, they made the war "the war" for you and left an indelible impression. Feel free to talk to me as one of "the boys" and remember there's not much that can make me blush or turn my stomach. Remember I'm an engineer's daughter and an only child, so I heard most of it before!

Also, don't forget to tell me about any souvenirs that you took home with you, or items that you held onto through the war such as photos or letters, that helped get you through the long days.

Thank you in advance for your help, after all this is **YOUR BOOK**, and I want it to be as accurate a depiction as it gets. Let the reader say, "Wow, that's what it WAS like", and not some distanced author's imaginings of World War II. Engineers, it's time that the public hear your story. Let your voice forever be heard!

Lovingly,

Marion