

## William Warin Bainbridge Jr.

Awards: Silver Star for actions on D-Day, purple heart, wounded on D-Day, 5 campaign stars, two unit citations from the Battle of the Bulge. Presidential Unit Citation with a Streamer embroidered "Belgium" and a French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, Streamer embroidered "Belgium."



"Bill"

Born May 3, 1902 - died 1969

Horace Mann school, New York

1916 Horace Mann school teams football, baseball, hockey

1916. WW1 Junior military training camp age 15. Plum Island New York

1918 Graduates from Horace Mann

1918 fall enters MIT

Mechanical Engineering Society (2, 3), Executive Committee (3) ; Corporation XV (2, 3, 4) , Treasurer (4); Theta Tau; Class Football (1, 2); Junior Board Technique 1920 (1); Assistant Manager Wrestling (2). Manager (3); Finance Committee (2, 3, 4). Assistant Undergraduate Treasurer (3); M. I. T. A. A. (2. 3. 4), Treasurer (4); Budget Committee (3. 4);

In 1921 his father committed suicide after suffering after affects from the deadly flu epidemic.

In 1922 Bill graduated from MIT with a degree in Engineering Administration. He was also a member of the MIT Post Society of Military Engineers. He was Commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 342nd engineers at age 21. Camp Clairborne, LA.

In 1924 he was working for the Henry Bainbridge Stationery Company. In 1940 he was a salesman for a roofing company in Chicago, Illinois. Living at 15 West Burton Street, proably a boarding house.

He was commission as a first lieutenant in April 1942. By July he was adjutant for the second battalion, and quickly recognized as a good leader and promoted to Captain in December. In England he attended bridge building school and British field engineer school.

In September 1943 he was transferred to the 254th engineers for added training. One of his assignments for D-Day was to get in early and determine bridging requirements, particularly for the Vire River. For this he was to land on Omaha beach, travel 12 miles, much behind enemy lines, to identify bridging needs for the local roads and the road from Isigny to Carentan. Logistics played an important role in the engineer battalions. Bridge components had to be found, transported to the site and assembled, often under fire. Eisenhower felt the Bailey bridges were a critical element in the victory in the European theater.

## D-Day June 7, 1944

At age 42 Captain Bill Bainbridge landed on Omaha Beach. The landings were made under heavy mortar, artillery, and machine gun fire. The engineers were hit hard. An artillery round to the bow of one landing craft was made just as unloading began and many engineers were killed and wounded as a result of the blast and fire. It is estimated that half of the initial force were casualties, and 75% of the equipment was lost. Bill was wounded.



Two platoons of "C" Company landed on Easy Green beach (in the center of Omaha Beach) from LCT's at 10:30 with bulldozers and about a ton of explosives each. Remnants of Company "B" and Company "C" were directed to open the D-1 exit. It was necessary to wipe out several sniper positions before actual work could begin. Approximately 30 prisoners were taken in the ensuing action.

Captain Bainbridge traveled inland and came back to join up with Brigadier General Dutch Cota in Vierville-sur-Mer at about 12:00. Returning to the beach from the east through heavy naval fire they brought back 5 prisoners. Cota and a Captain (presumably Bainbridge) helped open the escape off the beach. Working with elements of the battalion on the beach they opened the beach exit with 1,100 lbs of TNT.



The 254th Engineers supporting the battalion constructed four short treadway bridges on the road from La Cambe to Douet, and constructed a 40 foot double single Bailey Bridge on the Isigny-Carentan Road. Bridges were critical for moving men, tanks, artillery, fuel and material.

*Some of the Bailey bridges are still in use.*

## The Battle across Europe

The 254th played an active role as the Allies raced across France. The battalion was one of the first units to enter Paris. It built and repaired bridges, removed obstacles and mines, maintained the roads, and helped restore mobility for supply trucks and stalled infantry and armor units.

### 1944 December 16th. The Battle of the Bulge

The German offensive began on December 16. It was launched through the snow covered and densely forested Ardennes region between Belgium and Luxembourg. It caught the allies by surprise. The area was lightly defended and vulnerable.

Communications were poor and the Germans were in the rear of elements of the 99th Division before either the Division or Corps Headquarters knew that the flank had been turned. This was a serious error and only the heroic actions of the 254th Engineer Battalion slowed the German advance long enough to move up reinforcements.

The 254th was committed as infantry along the northern shoulder of the Bulge and ordered to form a defensive line south and east of Bullingen, Belgium. Elements of Kampfgruppe Peiper began assaulting the battalion's lines with infantry supported by tanks and half-tracks. By 0700 on December 17 the 254th reported thirty tanks with infantry south of Bullingen. They had to hold Bullingen as it was the only road available for the withdrawal of the 2nd Division from its exposed front and to move supplies and fuel.

The engineers beat back two German infantry attacks. Then the German tanks turned the tide. Falling back to the shelter of the buildings, the 254th did what it could to fend off the tanks. A third attack overran the battalion's lines, but stiff resistance prevented the supporting infantry from advancing. Without adequate weapons to combat the German armor, and under heavy artillery fire, the men of the 254th withdrew to successive positions, maintaining a heroic resistance for nine hours until relieved by the 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. As a result of its stand in the Ardennes, the 254th lost approximately 100 men dead, wounded, or taken prisoner.



The engineer battalions played a key role in fighting in the chaotic early days of the German offensive. By destroying key bridges, removing signs, creating obstacles, and fighting as infantry, the engineers delayed the Wehrmacht long enough for the Allies to organize a counter-offensive. The engineers actions were so effective that it led the German commander SS-LTC Joachim Peiper to mutter in frustration, "Verdammte Ingenieure" (*The damned engineers*).

### **1944 Race to Germany**

The 254th continued to serve with distinction until the end of the war. The battalion participated in the Rhine River crossings and constructed the largest tactical bridge in the European theater of operations, the 1,372 foot long Victor Bridge. It also took part in the liberation of Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, and assisted in the clean up and reconstruction of the city after the end of hostilities.

1945 Bill was tasked to take over as executive officer for the engineering section of the Assembly Area Command, Rheims. His men were responsible for building 23 camps for troops preparing for the Pacific theater.

The 254th arrived back in the US in December 1945 and was deactivated on 22 December at Camp Myles Standish, MA. In 1946 WWB was promoted to Major and then returned to civilian life.

### **Civilian Life**

He was an engineer, building manager and involved in real estate. In 1940 he was working for US Gypsum. This led to a roofing element patent 2271728 issued in 1942.

In 1945 Captain Bainbridge married nursing Captain Florence Thompson of Nova Scotia somewhere in France (New York Times note). Alexander Charles Bainbridge was born, March 1, 1947. In the 1950 Census Bill was living in Westchester NY with his wife, Florence, and son Alexander. Bill died in 1969. Florence died in 1991. His son died March 12, 2010, in East Hampton, Suffolk, NY. Alexander had a civil engineering degree from Tufts and was an artist, engineer, and craftsman.