



35th Signal Construction Battalion



Cherbourg Campaign

000869

CHERBOURG CAMPAIGN

I N D E X

	<u>Page</u>
Cherbourg Campaign (General)	1
Rehabilitation of Cherbourg Exchange	12
Port Service at Cherbourg	15

The following units' reports were used in writing the history of the Cherbourg Campaign:

29th Signal Company
165th Signal Photo Company
175th Signal Repair Company
208th Signal Depot Company
215th Signal Depot Company
297th Signal Installation Company
816th Signal Port Service Company
980th Signal Service Company

26th Signal Construction Battalion
29th Signal Construction Battalion
32nd Signal Construction Battalion
35th Signal Construction Battalion
50th Signal Battalion
56th Signal Battalion
3111th Signal Service Battalion

Signal Corps Technical History, First U.S. Army Signal Service

Reports for the following units were not available for this report, since the units left the theater during September 1944:

186th Joint Assault Signal Company
286th Joint Assault Signal Company
293rd Joint Assault Signal Company
294th Joint Assault Signal Company

000876

THE CHERBOURG CAMPAIGN

On 5 June 1944, the unshaken shield of the western front, the "Atlantic Wall" behind which the boastful German had long trailed his coat for the Allied Forces, was still up-right.

"Nine hours will be required to account for the temerity of the enemy" was the slogan of the sneering German High Command.

The dawn of 6 June saw the beginning of a duplicate demolition.

On that historical morning, the German Western Army started to tumble over the debris of its impregnable fortifications.

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Although no records are yet available concerning the activities of the Joint Assault Signal Companies, special mention should be made of their gallant action in the initial landing operations and the establishment of the first communications on the Continent.

The Joint Assault Signal Companies of the Engineer Special Brigades which landed according to plan, immediately started radio channels and lateral wire nets on the Beachhead. The 293th Joint Assault Signal Company which followed the 294th Joint Assault Signal Company, sustained heavy casualties and lost nearly one third of its vehicles and half of its radio Equipment. The 186th Joint Assault Company also paid a heavy toll but shortly after landing had wire communications functioning satisfactorily. The first attempt to put ashore an SCR-193 had been unsuccessful. Consequently, since no radio channels between the Brigade and VII Corps Headquarters Ship U.S.S. BAYFIELD were available, naval channels were the only means of communication.

The Army Command Post was located near GRANDCAMP-LES-BAINS, France, on D plus 2. The Advance Command Post personnel came ashore the following night, D plus 3 and, early on 10 June 1944, Spiral-four wire communication was established to V Corps and the Engineer Special Brigade Groups. These lines were placed by the 35th Signal Construction Battalion.

000871

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Wire lines (Spiral-four) were then started on both ends of the Army-VII axis, in preparation for joining after the first assault had forced the enemy South of the Vire estuary.

Radio channels were available to both Corps, the Engineer Brigade Group and the 1st Engineer Brigade. The successful establishment, on the following day, 11 June, of a very high frequency radio link and carrier to the United Kingdom from Pointe du Hoc, France, to the Isle of Wight, and thence to the IX Tactical Air Command, set off the communication achievements which were of such vital importance during the early phase of landing operations.

For the first time, radio-link equipment with carrier proved to be a dependable means of communication in the field; six channels being used on this system: one telephone, four teletypewriters and one facsimile.

These preliminary operations were but the start of the task which the Signal Corps had to face throughout the Invasion Campaign. The lack of records from a certain number of units do not permit a complete report of this work. Available records, however, afford sufficient information to fully appreciate the activities and achievements of the Signal Corps.

At H-hour, on D-Day, 2 Dukw's of the 56th Signal Battalion were dropped by landing craft about 10 miles off the Coast of Normandy. Signalmen in these Dukw's composed an information team.

Their mission was to furnish fast and reliable radio channels from the Beachhead to the Commanding General on the Headquarters Ship afloat in the Channel.

At H-hour plus 15 minutes, while still off shore, they opened their radios and began sending messages. After being forced back due to the heavy mortar and machine gun fire, they succeeded in landing at about H plus 3½ hours. They operated their radios without pause under a hail of enemy shells. One dukw was knocked out and for more than 15 hours, the one remaining crew maintained a direct radio channel to the Headquarters Ship. Sergeant Leland R. Raborn, leader of this invasion outfit and 15 men of his team received the Silver Star for gallantry.

000512

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circuits between these two towns were replaced with new .104 copperweld wire.

The 35th Signal Construction Battalion had rehabilitated the top crossarm of 16 wires on the French lead from Lison Gare to Bayeux. Company A after its experience with the line farther west, replaced nearly all of the 16 wires on the second crossarm when it was given the responsibility of rehabilitating and maintaining this section. Needless to say, the results were better than those experienced before, but still low insulation had not been overcome sufficiently to operate these circuits to the capacity the battalion had hoped for. The solution to the problem was obvious. Only the French poles should have been used. American arms and wire would have provided the kind of circuits needed, but when the battalion came to this conclusion, the war was moving on and it left the Bayeux-Cherbourg lead behind as a good lesson for future reference.

During the period 14 June - 25 June 1944, the battalion accomplished much in the way of learning to perform its mission under battle conditions. Both construction companies had been required to work day and night on all types of signal construction projects under every conceivable condition then existent. The personnel was fast becoming accustomed to the turmoil, the uncertainty, the confusion and unpleasantness incident to warfare. Long hours and great distances were accepted as a matter of course. Small detachments were operating at test stations from Bayeux to Cherbourg and from the beaches to points just north of St. Lo and Periers. Company A extended its 20-wire lead south 5 miles along the road from Lison Gare to within 1000 yards of enemy lines toward St. Lo and built a 20-wire standard line from Carentan to Saintenay along the road to Periers where again work was suspended because of the close

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000524

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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This Signal Construction Battalion* served in the European Theater of Operations from 4 September 1943. Until 29 December 1943 it served under Services of Supply, after which it was assigned to First United States Army. While assigned to the Services of Supply, a great amount of cable construction for airports was done under the British Government Post Office. While engaged in this type of work, it was noted that the number of cable splicers provided by the Table of Organization was inadequate. It was, therefore, necessary to utilize all available cable splicers and at the same time start a training program for more. Despite these efforts, capable cable splicers are still considered scarce, as after arriving on the continent and penetrating into the interior, more and more cable rehabilitation became necessary to establish an efficient wire communication network. Approximately 90 percent of all wire communications installed and maintained by this organization was underground cable.

While still assigned to Services of Supply in England, a Master Sergeant developed a cable guide that proved of great value in guiding lead cable from the reel into the rings on the strand through which it was being pulled. This guide proved its worth both in England, and later in installing wireheads for the First United States Army in France, Belgium and Germany.

From 7 June 1944 to 28 February 1945, this organization provided telephone communication for First United States Army. During the entire period, but especially the earlier part, many arterial telephone channels were via spiral four cable. Due to the fact that this unit had not been trained in the United States in placing this type of cable and that mechanical hangers and dead-ends were frequently unavailable, several inventions and deviations of methods were made. Field wire ties or marline ties were used in place of hangers, and dead-ends were made by passing a bight of the cable around a pole or tree twice

* Reference: 35th Signal Construction Battalion.

000526

and taping the bight to the standing part of the cable.

On 2½ ton wire-laying vehicles various improvisations were made. Racks were built on the inside for the storage of lineman's belts and tools, and ladder racks were attached to the sides of the vehicle. Steps were built across the back end to facilitate entrance to and exit from the vehicle. Shockproof boxes were built for carrying delicate instruments such as EE65 test sets and EE6B field telephones. EC-5 chests were placed on team vehicles for storing tape, wire tags, marline, etc.

For sagging open wire, a set of 10 wire equalizers was improvised by a Technical Sergeant using captured blocks which were assembled and welded according to his plan. The equalizers were used to sag 10 wires at the same time by means of a pulley for each wire, threaded to two five-sheave blocks, which were in turn threaded through a single sheave block. This equalizer was tensioned by winch line.

For testing sleeves on lead cable for leaks, a pressure testing device was designed. This device consisted of a valve with a clamp attached to affix it firmly to the sleeve. This valve allowed air or nitrogen gas to be pumped into the sleeve through a hole. Leaks could be detected by painting the joints with soapy water and noting the appearance of any bubbles.

It was found through experience that in rehabilitating underground cable, extreme care must be taken in protecting splices. If soft gravel-free earth was not placed under each sleeve, the pressure from above broke the joints. This organization also built wooden boxes around the sleeves to prevent crushing by rocks when filling in. In one case a length of tape armored subterranean cable was cut in and left above ground temporarily in what was believed to be a safe place in order to establish quick communications. It was crushed by tanks before a trench could be dug in which to place it.

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